

How are you managing parasites at housing this year? - November 25

With the days closing in and grass growth slowing, housing of cattle is soon around the corner, and all the tasks that come with it. Having been a very dry summer, overall internal parasite risk has been much reduced both for worms and fluke. However, the last couple of months of rain has luckily allowed for a good autumn flush of grass but, conversely, a much higher risk of worms and resuming of fluke lifecycles on pasture. If mild conditions continue then extended grazing seasons with warm wet conditions will also allow the risk period to extend further into the year than usual. So it is important to beware of parasite risk and housing provides a good opportunity to treat for both internal and external parasites.

Worming at Housing – Who? What?

At housing there are benefits in treating first grazing season youngstock, particularly if it is known that there has been gutworm challenge during the grazing season. Due to cattle developing immunity after approximately 2 grazing seasons, further worming past this stage isn't typically warranted as older stock can cope and control gutworms themselves.

Top tip this winter – when housing youngstock, clipping backs can reduce risk of pneumonia as it helps control humidity levels when cattle sweat. It will also help pour-on based products to have better skin contact and absorption.

Traditionally clear pour-on based wormers have been used for housing treatments, both for practical ease and also for its efficacy. When treating at housing for gutworms we want to use a product which works against 'encysted' / 'inhibited' gutworms. As temperatures drop gutworms switch their lifecycle from producing eggs for the next generation within cattle stomach, instead to entering a hibernation state within the wall of the stomach. This allows them in spring, when temperatures rise, to become active again and reproduce within cattle. We are limited to only 'clear' or 'white' wormers being effective against this stage.

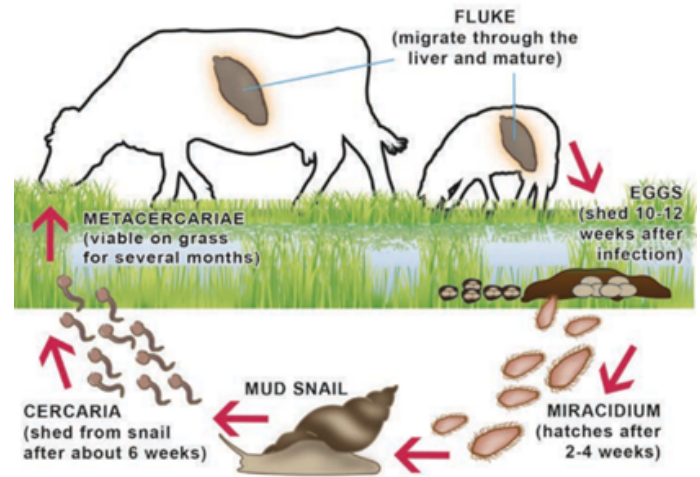
Clear wormers are also useful if you encounter lice or mite issues, as they are also generally effective for these. Typically, these external parasites reside on cattle in low or manageable levels but housing allows them to become an issue with thicker coats, close contact and some mites surviving in the environment. If animals are immune suppressed, mites/lice can become a real issue. If you encounter problems with itchy cattle it's worth discussing with a vet, as different products work better/worse depending on what type of mite/lice you have. Hence early intervention with the appropriate product can be used, as injectable vs. pour-on clear wormers and permethrin based fly products have different efficacies.

It's worth considering if you could switch up your housing dose from 'clear' to 'white' wormer, particularly if you tend to use 'clear'-based wormers during the grazing season. It's the case that the more often we use a wormer the more selection pressure we are putting on the worm population, increasing the risk of wormer resistance developing; with mounting anecdotal evidence of 'clear' wormer resistance. Moreover, it's considering the environmental impact of wormer residues within farmyard manure as 'clear' wormers rely on UV to breakdown, hence could still have insecticidal effects when spread after storage. 'White' wormers have some impact on soil invertebrates as well but less lethal compared to 'clear' wormers.

Fluking at Housing – Who? What? When?

Liver fluke has a complex lifecycle involving some stages within the mudsnail, which unsurprisingly likes to live in wet conditions such as muddy puddles, poached ground and bodies of water. Hence a dry summer means levels of mud snails & fluke is likely to have been low, as liver fluke requires at least 10 weeks of warm wet weather ($>10^{\circ}\text{C}$) to complete its lifecycle.

However, with the last couple of months being wet and mild, plus extended grazing seasons, it could mean that fluke infection could be later this year. For some the risk of infection could be low especially on drier ground or for others a later high risk. Hence if there's a year it'd be worth testing it'd be this year! As an example - a single flukicide dose for a 600kg cow can cost up to £5 +vat per animal, over a herd of 30 cows & followers it could cost up to £225. When compared to around £25 for the lab fee (depending on which test used) to test to know if it is appropriate to fluke.



There are a few options for testing, including:

- Bulk tank antibody testing – gives a useful insight to herd level exposure and becomes positive from 2-4 weeks from exposure, but we need to beware of dilution effect if only some animals have been exposed
- Blood antibody testing – this is best used by sampling 10 first grazing season youngstock, becomes positive from 2-4 weeks from exposure to fluke
- Faeces antigen testing – this wouldn't show up positive until 6 weeks post infection. We would need 5 x faecal samples which are then pooled into one test. This has to be sent off to a lab and can take up to 5 working days for results
- Faeces fluke egg count – this doesn't show up positive until 10-12 weeks from exposure to fluke and is the least sensitive but most rapid test option. 5-10 faecal samples are pooled into one test and can be done within our own lab, so we'd have results within 48 hours. It can be useful to do on day 1 of a TB test for example to guide treatment on day 2.

There are pros and cons to the testing options, so it's worth discussing with a vet on what is most appropriate.

It's important to consider when to fluke. Not all fluke products work on all life stages. Triclabendazole-based products work on all stages and are available as an oral drench only. However, with evidence of triclabendazole resistance in some parts of the country is worth considering alternatives. Closantel (Solantel) works only on immature and adult fluke so delaying treatment until 7-8 weeks post housing, with the benefit that it is a pour on product but can't be used in dairy lactating animals. Oxytoclozanide (Rumenil) and Albendazole works only on adult fluke so delaying treatment until 10-12 weeks post housing, with the benefit that it has short meat and milk withholds but is an oral drench.

Cattle don't develop immunity to fluke so it is appropriate to treat all potentially exposed stock regardless of age and, when testing, consider that different groups of stock may have different levels of exposure/infection due to different grazing.

It's been a challenging and unusual year with the weather and, as a result, has altered how we could manage parasites, with some potential savings on fluke treatments. Feel free to get in contact to discuss testing and treatment options.

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