

With some hot weather, grass shooting up and cattle enjoying being outdoors, July is a key month for a number of health issues. Here are a few things we've already starting to see this season and some tips on what to watch out for to hopefully catch these early.

Hypomagnesaemia (Grass Staggers)

As grass shoots up, so does the risk of grass staggers. This is a serious and often fatal condition caused by low magnesium levels and is most commonly seen in suckler cows grazing lush, rapidly growing grass, particularly during cool, wet weather.

Magnesium is required for normal muscle and nerve function. When blood magnesium levels drop quickly, the nerves become overactive, leading to muscle tremors, stiffness and in severe cases, seizures and death.

Signs to watch for:

- Nervous/excitable behaviour
- Twitching around the face, ears and shoulders
- Stiff, unsteady gait, staggering
- Teeth grinding
- Aggression or unusual behaviour
- Isolation from the herd
- Collapse, paddling and convulsions



Nadis, 2010

Although lush grass is the most common trigger, anything that interferes with magnesium uptake can increase the risk.

This includes:

- Pastures heavily fertilised with nitrogen
- Low phosphorus levels in the soil
- Sodium deficiency
- Diets based mainly on cereal forages such as wheat, oats or rye

If you suspect a case, contact your vet immediately. After speaking with one of us, we may advise you give a bottle of magnesium under the skin.

Prevention tips:

- Supplement magnesium through water or mineral sources
- Provide access to hay when grazing lush pasture
- Avoid turning cattle onto very short, rapidly growing grass
- Ideally, wait until grass is 4–6 inches high before turnout

Longer-term management:

- Increase sward diversity by including more clover and/or legumes
- Carry out soil testing regularly and base fertiliser use on soil analysis

Cerebrocortical Necrosis (CCN)

CCN is a neurological disease caused by a deficiency of vitamin B1 (thiamine). It's often mistaken for grass staggers because the signs are very similar, though it is most commonly seen in calves between 6 and 12 months.

Normally, bacteria in the rumen produce enough vitamin B1 to meet a cow's requirements. Problems arise when changes in the rumen offset this and allow thiaminase-producing bacteria to multiply, destroying B1 before the animal can use it. Risk factors include sudden dietary changes, access to plants containing thiaminase and high sulphur levels in feed or water.

Signs to watch for:

- Apparent blindness or stargazing
- Staggering or unsteady movement
- Circling
- Head pressing
- Sudden death

If you suspect CCN, call us immediately. Early treatment with vitamin B1 can be very successful and delays to treatment reduce the prognosis.

Look out for Mare's tail – a thiaminase containing plant found around wet areas, drains, ponds and shaded ground where cattle tend to gather during warmer weather.



Babesiosis (Red water)

Redwater is a disease caused by the parasite Babesia, which is spread between cattle by ticks. The parasite attacks red blood cells, leading to anaemia. Again, this can be fatal. Cases are most commonly seen around two weeks after infection, and red urine is often noticed first.

Signs to watch for:

- Dark red or brown urine
- High temperature
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy
- Diarrhoea, sometimes followed by constipation
- Pale gums



Jess

Diagnosis is usually confirmed by examining a blood smear and prompt treatment is required. Early intervention for all these diseases make all the difference. Keep an eye out and if in doubt, give us a call.

FARM MEDICINE HANDLING COURSE - FOR BEEF AND SHEEP CLIENTS

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