

NorCal News...

Merry Christmas



All of the team at NorCal would like to wish you a very happy and prosperous New Year!



Tis the season... for avian influenza (bird flu)

A combination of favourable conditions and high numbers of migrating birds mean that we are yet again seeing cases of avian influenza (AI) in the UK.

New rules come into force on the 14th December 2020 which require all poultry keepers, whether you have just a few birds or thousands, to keep birds indoors or otherwise separate from wild birds. You should also reinforce your biosecurity - e.g. by cleaning and disinfecting clothing, footwear, equipment and vehicles before and after contact with birds, and ensure all feed and water is not accessible to wild birds.



Avian influenza can be high pathogenic (HPAI) or low pathogenic (LPAI). While the high pathogenic type is more severe, the signs to look out for are similar with both types:

- Respiratory signs e.g. coughing, sneezing, gaping or other strange noises
- Changes in appetite and production
- Swollen or discoloured head
- Unexplained mortality

Anybody who keeps poultry, from commercial producers to those with a couple of pet hens, has to keep a close eye on their birds and if you have any concerns you must contact the practice. If you find dead wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks) or other dead wild birds, such as gulls or birds of prey, you should report them to the **Defra helpline (03459 33 55 77)**.

Medicines Administration Course

We now have a Red Tractor Approved medicine administration training course that can be delivered in person or online via Zoom.



It is a Red Tractor requirement that all medicines are administered by a competent person, and a recommendation for beef and sheep farmers that competency is demonstrated by completing an approved course.

Our course covers all aspects of medicines use, including storage, administration, disposal and record keeping to ensure you are up to date with all the Red Tractor requirements.

Once completed, all participants will be issued with a certificate of attendance.

Cost of the course is £35+ VAT per person

If you are interested in completing the course please get in touch with Jono at wantage@norcalvets.co.uk or call 01235 429 767

Pneumonia

We have seen a surge in pneumonia cases in calves as the winter draws in. Signs to look out for include increased breathing rate or effort, reduced appetite, sunken eyes or droopy ears, poor coat quality and a rectal temperature >39 degrees. Pneumonia is a complex condition that results from a combination of factors - the environmental conditions, the presence of disease-causing viruses and bacteria and the calf's immune system. When tackling pneumonia, it is important to look at all three of these areas, otherwise you may be fighting a losing battle!

1. The calf's immune system

A strong immune system is vital for fighting disease challenges. The most important factor in developing good immunity is colostrum management - calves need to receive 4-6l of **good quality** colostrum in the first 6 hours of life. Getting some blood samples done on a few 7-10day old calves is a really good, quick and cheap way to find out if your protocol is working.

The other thing you can do to boost calf immunity is to vaccinate against the most common causes of pneumonia. For closed herds, it may be worth testing to find out which specific viruses are a problem on your farm. For herds that buy in stock we would recommend a vaccine that covers multiple causes, as different stock may introduce different diseases. Calves can be vaccinated using an intranasal vaccine from 1 week of age. Have a chat with us to discuss a vaccination protocol that would suit you.

2. Disease challenge

Most pneumonia cases are caused by viruses, and then calves get secondary bacterial infections (hence the use of antibiotics). Between farms, good biosecurity and quarantine procedures are essential for preventing different pneumonia viruses gaining access. Within your farm, there is also a lot you can do to reduce the disease challenge on calves. Try and keep groups of different ages separate, as shared airspace can allow viruses to jump from older cattle to younger ones. If possible, isolate any affected animals in a sick pen to reduce spread to other individuals.

Ensure calves are checked carefully and treated at the first sign of disease. Have a chat with us about treatment choice if you are unsure, but we would normally recommend an antibiotic to address the bacterial infection, anti inflammatory pain relief to improve appetite, breathing and reduce temperature and supportive care with fluids to maintain hydration.

3. Environment

Controlling the environmental conditions is crucial for avoiding pneumonia outbreaks. While we can't do anything about the weather, we can modify housing to improve the internal environment. Key points are:

- Ventilation - housing should be well ventilated but not drafty - the air should feel fresh, and there should not be a strong smell of ammonia where the calves are lying (to test this you really need to get down to calf level...). For buildings to ventilate well they need adequate air intake and outlet. If these are lacking, it may be possible to create them, e.g by removing boards or roof ridges, or by putting in a positive pressure ventilation system (which can be really good value). We have a smoke machine at the practice so that we can come and assess the ventilation of sheds and make recommendations for improvements.
- Drainage - calf lying areas should be well drained so that bedding does not lie wet - you should be able to kneel down (without waterproofs!) in the lying areas and not get wet knees!
- Bedding - calves should be kept well bedded, and should be able to nest into their bedding for warmth. In an adequately bedded pen you won't be able to see the legs of calves that are lying down as they will be covered by the straw.

Pneumonia can be an expensive and frustrating disease but there is a lot you can do to help prevent it. **For more advice specific to your farm have a chat with one of the vets.**

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