

6 ways to tackle Joint Ill in lambs this Spring

Joint ill, also known as infectious arthritis, is a common and serious condition affecting lambs, particularly in the spring. Moredun stats report that it often impacts 1-2% of lambs, but up to 50% has also been reported – so it can cause quite the problem when not addressed. Caused by bacterial infections, it often leads to swelling, lameness, and, if not treated promptly, can result in permanent damage or even death. Preventing and treating joint ill is crucial. Let's look at five ways you can prevent it this lambing season:

- 1. Hygiene, hygiene, hygiene** – The primary cause of joint ill in lambs is the infection of the joints with bacteria, most commonly *Streptococcus* or *E. coli*, which can enter the lamb's body through the cord or cuts in the skin. Ensuring a clean birthing environment is key in preventing the spread of these bacteria. Ensure that the lambing pens and equipment are sanitised as best as possible and avoid handling lambs with dirty hands – invest in gloves! Additionally, lambs should be dried off immediately after birth to prevent moisture accumulation, which can contribute to bacterial growth.
- 2. Consider NoBacz** – A new product which has been trialled by Fiona Lovatt for treating lambs' navels, and it's had some decent results. The trial showed a 21% reduction in mortality compared to iodine dipped navels and lambs were on average 230g heavier at 8 weeks. Maybe worth a consideration?

- 3. Colostrum is gold** – we all know colostrum is crucial for the lamb's immune system and start in life. It's rich in antibodies which will bolster the immune system and help fight off infections, like the ones that cause joint ill. Ensure that lambs receive adequate colostrum within the first few hours of birth – make sure you have plenty of colostrum replacement ready.
- 4. Prompt Treatment (protocols in place!)** – If joint ill is suspected in a lamb, swift intervention is essential. Early-stage joint ill is often treatable with antibiotics, particularly when the infection is localised in the joints. Consult with your vet to determine the appropriate treatment protocol and communicate with your team.
- 5. Isolate Affected Lambs** – Lambs with joint ill should be promptly isolated from healthy animals to prevent the spread of bacteria. Keeping affected lambs in a clean, dry, and comfortable environment will help prevent secondary infections. Regularly clean and disinfect pens to minimise bacterial buildup.
- 6. Consider a neonatal lamb risk assessment** – looking at areas of risk in the lamb, ewe and the environment and minimise these.

By following these preventive measures, you can significantly reduce the risk of joint ill in lambs this spring. If you want more advice ahead of lambing, please speak to your vet or drop in the practice.



What precautions can you take to minimise Bluetongue risk?

Bluetongue is an infectious viral disease, which was first detected in the 1700s. It is widely found in many parts of North Africa and the Middle East, and there have been occasional outbreaks of the disease recorded in Southern Europe over the past century. In 2006 the first major outbreak was seen in Northern Europe, followed by re-emergence in 2015 and again in 2023.

The Bluetongue virus (BTV) can infect all ruminants, including cattle, sheep and deer. Sheep show the most severe illness, whereas cattle and deer show milder signs of the disease but act as a reservoir for re-infection. BTV is spread mainly by *Culicoides* biting midges, but other biting insects may also transmit the virus.

Our current disease situation is thought to have been introduced to the UK by midges blown across from Europe.

What to look out for (clinical signs):

- Fever
- Redness of the mucus membranes
- Sores on the nose, gum and inside the mouth
- Swelling of the face, lips and tongue
- Lameness
- Abortion or deformities in lambs or calves
- Lethargy
- Milk Drop
- Death

The “blue tongue”, from which the disease gets its name, is not frequently seen. Animals may also develop breathing difficulties if the tongue swells.

The current cold weather means the midge lifespan is shorter and they are not reproducing as quickly. It is hoped that a combination of a cold winter and culling of infected ruminants will keep the spread of the disease low while vaccination is implemented. However, this situation might change dramatically if we are presented with a warm and early Spring.

As there is no treatment for the virus, prevention through vaccination and restricted movements in affected areas remains the best defence.

The proactive campaign – ‘Battle Bluetongue’ – has been developed by Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) and Ruminant Health & Welfare (RH&W) in collaboration with key veterinary and industry associations.

Three key messages:

1. **ASSESS** risk to BTV-3 on farm with your vet using the ‘vaccine decision maker tool’ together
2. **PROTECT** businesses from restrictions by managing all identified risks that can be controlled on livestock holdings.

3. **DEFEND** stock by vaccinating the right animals for BTV-3 to reduce transmission and stop the spread.

At present, vaccination is only licensed for use in England and Wales from 1 March - however vets and farmers in all devolved nations are encouraged to make sure they are aware of how BTV-3 is transmitted, take caution against misinformation about protecting their herds or flocks. Please speak to your vet for more information on the situation.



Figure 1 - Sheep Foot Bluetongue (Source: Pirbright Institute)



Figure 2 - Oedema of face of sheep (Source: Pirbright Institute)



In this edition...

Page 3: Has your antimicrobial use decreased?

Has your antimicrobial use decreased?

According to the latest Dairy Antimicrobial Focus Report from Kingshay, the use of antimicrobials on UK dairy farms has reduced by almost a fifth in the past five years. That's huge!

The report is based on data from 879 dairy herds across the UK using their Antimicrobial Monitoring Service for the period ending March 2024. It shows that individual herd antimicrobial use ranged from 0.02 to 90.45 mg/PCU. However, average total antimicrobial usage for the year was 12.7 mg/kg PCU – down from 13.7 mg/PCU in 2023 and 15.7 mg/PCU in 2020.

This is good news for the sector and having it reported gives us a check that we're headed in the right direction. It's always good to note though that the aim isn't for no antimicrobials to be used in farmed animals, but instead for their use to be reduced as much as possible whilst still maintaining their availability and effectiveness to treat disease. We need antibiotics to work when we need them most.

The data also suggests that neither herd health or milk production have been impacted by this

reduction in use; in fact, as total antimicrobial use has reduced, mastitis rates and bulk somatic cell counts have also reduced, and there hasn't been a rise in culling for mastitis or an increase in the rate of cows leaving the herd.

Furthermore, the report, which also includes health data from Kingshay's Health Manager Service this year for the first time, found that mastitis rates reduced to 26 cases per 100 cows – down from 29 in 2023 and 42 in 2020.

Antibiotic dry cow tube usage declined by 5.8% in the year to 0.425 DCDVet – the defined course dose – while lactating cow tube usage reduced by 10.2% to 0.386 DCDVet.

Mastitis treatment is one of the key reasons for using antimicrobials in dairy, but the fall in the number of cases and associated decrease in tube usage demonstrates our commitment to addressing the challenge of this disease.

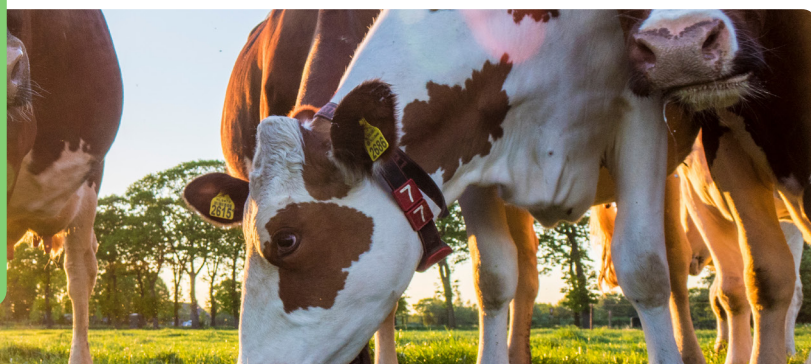
However! There is room for continued improvement – especially in the 25% of herds using the most antimicrobials as these higher users account for 50% of total group usage. Sitting down and taking stock of your antibiotic usage with your vet is key to identifying problem areas, and only by scrutinising the data can we be sure that antibiotic use on farm has in fact decreased.

The 2024 annual Dairy Antimicrobial Focus Report can be accessed via the Kingshay website www.kingshay.com/

19%

**reduction in dairy
antimicrobial use
since 2020**

Source: Kingshay Dairy Antimicrobial Report 2024



Industry Funding

Keep an eye out for new rounds of funding which will be released soon, including technology, equipment and capital grants which will be released in the Summer.

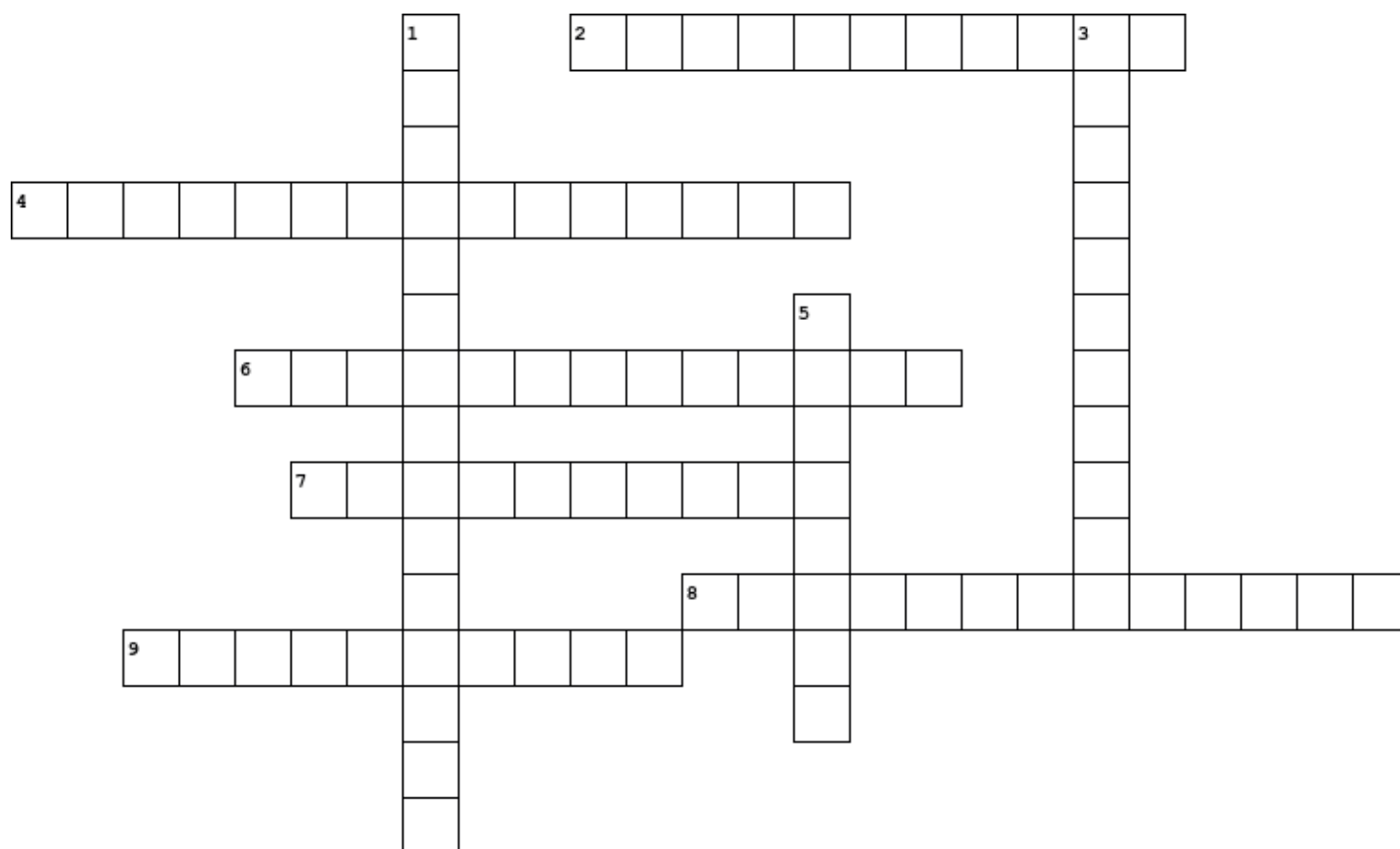
There have also been Animal Health and Welfare Review updates which means you will soon be able to apply for reviews for more than one species. A total of three reviews and three follow ups per species until 19th June 2027. This means, if you're a dairy, beef and sheep farm you could access up to £9318 worth of funding. We will have more on this soon! For more up to date information, subscribe to the DEFRA blog.

In this edition...

Page 4: Tea time teaser

Tea Time Teaser!

Farming and animal films and TV shows!



Across

2. A British farming show hosted by Adam Henson.
4. A reality show about vets in rural England, based on the works of James Herriot.
6. A reality show about a new entrant farmer from the world of cars.
7. Film based on The Great Escape – poultry version.
8. A cartoon about a clever sheep on a farm.
9. Series following the goings on of Longleat Safari Park.

Down

1. BBC Two programme following different farming families.
3. A seasonal show which documents a busy time in the sheep calendar!
5. 2006 animated film about farm animals.

If you would like more information on what we've discussed in this month's newsletter, please speak to any of our farm veterinary team.

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