

Get fluke treatment right this autumn

4 November 2013

The COWS industry group (www.cattleparasites.org.uk) is urging beef and dairy farmers to consider the risk of liver fluke infection this autumn and, if indicated, to treat cattle appropriately. Risk factors include a previous history of fluke infection on the farm or farm of origin and grazing wet areas of pasture or near muddy areas, such as poached ground near gateways and troughs. Abattoir feedback provides very clear evidence of liver fluke infection, whereas diagnostic tests on blood and, on dairy farms, bulk milk tank samples can test for evidence of exposure and tests on dung will only work if adult fluke are present.

Liver fluke take approximately 10-12 weeks to mature following ingestion of infective stages and not every type of flukicide is fully effective against all immature stages. It is important to choose an appropriate product and to administer it at the correct dosage and at the most suitable time of year according to the life cycle of the parasite. The COWS group is strongly advising that farmers discuss product choice with their vet or suitably qualified person (SQP) as part of their herd health plan.

Choice of drug will be influenced not only by risk of infection, but also by its meat/milk withdrawal, risks posed by other parasites that may be present and ease of administration. The table below summarises the main treatment options in relation to when they are best used post-housing.

Active ingredient	Administration route	Stage of fluke killed	Best time for treatment after housing
Triclabendazole	Oral	2 weeks onwards	From 2 weeks
	Pour-on	6-8 weeks onwards	From 6 weeks
Closantel	s/c injection or pour-on	7 weeks onwards	From 7 weeks
Nitroxynil	s/c injection	8 weeks onwards	From 8 weeks
Clorsulon	s/c injection	Adults only	From 12 weeks
Oxyclozanide	Oral	Adults only	From 12 weeks
Albendazole	Oral	Adults only	From 12 weeks

If fluke risk is high, treatment in the autumn with triclabendazole, which kills almost all stages of liver fluke, may be appropriate, as long as there is no evidence of resistance to this drug. If the risk of infection is lower, then anthelmintics with activity against late immature/adult fluke stages can be used later in the season (December/January time). If cattle are dosed around housing time, use faecal egg counts in late winter to see if a second dose is needed to remove any fluke that were too young to be killed by the first treatment. A product that targets adult fluke can be used at this time.

A limited range of products can be used in dairy cattle. COWS suggests treatment at drying off be considered if there is evidence of infection in the herd and that consideration should be given to the time of year (highest levels of infection typically occur on grass in autumn) and if cows are housed or out at pasture during their dry period.

COWS stresses that no flukicide has persistent action and allowing cattle onto fluke infected pasture after treatment immediately re-exposes them to the risk of infection. If cattle are housed after

treatment, then there is a very low risk of picking up new infection until they are turned out again. So, if turning animals back out after treatment, use tactics such as moving to 'low risk' areas or fencing off risky areas. If cattle must remain in risky areas, then monitoring for infection is essential as further treatments may be needed.

COWS [Top Ten Tips for Controlling Liver Fluke in Cattle](#) can be found at www.cattleparasites.org.uk, along with [details of flukicide products for cattle](#) including information on active ingredient, stage of fluke killed, route of administration and withdrawal period.

Editors Notes:

COWS aims to provide the best available, evidence-based information to the cattle industry in relation to the sustainable control of parasites in dairy and beef cattle.

The COWS initiative was started in 2010 with the publication of a technical guide aimed at vets and advisors. In 2012 a core group of stakeholders came together to try and give COWS a more structured base on which to provide the best available, evidence-based, information into the cattle industry.

For a full list of stakeholders and more information please see: www.cattleparasites.org.uk

Queries regarding this press release should be made to: Professor Diana Williams, University of Liverpool, who is leading the technical advice covering liver fluke on behalf of COWS. Tel: 0151 795 0220, Email: williadj@liv.ac.uk