

# Dalehead Veterinary Group Ltd



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24 hour  
Dedicated  
Farm Cover

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## Grass Tetany (staggers) in sheep

While we are still waiting for the grass to grow, there is a risk of grass tetany where ewes and lambs are held up on a bare pasture with supplementation and then turned onto lush pasture which is low in magnesium and low in fibre, resulting in a marked change in diet.

Signs of grass tetany appear very rapidly with tremors, convulsions and rapid death.

Prevention includes ensuring ewes have a daily intake of magnesium until the animals get accustomed to the change in diet. This is achieved by offering high-mag lick buckets, supplementing with concentrates or the addition of magnesium to water. Magnesium bullets can also be administered.

Treatment with subcutaneous magnesium is an option but unless treated very early after onset of clinical signs treatment may be unsuccessful.



For more information or advice regarding prevention or treatment, please give us a call on 01729 823538

## Nematodirus Risk in Young Lambs



The Nematodirus parasite has a simple life-cycle. Adult worms which live in the intestines of sheep/lambs lay eggs that are deposited on pasture in faeces. The Nematodirus eggs will only hatch out to release infective larvae after a period of cold weather followed by warmer weather with average daily temperatures above 10°C. This can result in a massive challenge of infective larvae on pasture in the spring when young lambs, which have no resistance to the parasite, start grazing. Depending on the weather conditions this usually occurs in mid to late May.

Acute Nematodirus infection can be a cause of sudden death but more often results in a profuse watery yellow-green scour and ill thrift. The concern is that the performance of young lambs that receive an early season check in growth due to Nematodirus may have reduced growth rates for the rest of the grazing season due to intestinal damage.

The Nematodirus risk map on the **SCOPS website** ([www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk)) shows that the Nematodirus hatching season is already in progress in most of the UK. Highest risk fields are those grazed by young lambs in May/June 2013 or 2014 which could harbour dangerous levels of larvae particularly if Nematodirus has been diagnosed in the past.

Points to remember include:

- \* Nematodirus can cause clinical symptoms in lambs before the larvae they are carrying have matured into egg laying adults, therefore faecal egg counts from scouring lambs cannot be relied on to diagnose acute Nematodirus infection.
- \* Re-infection with larvae can occur rapidly if lambs are kept on the same pasture so that a second treatment may be necessary after 7-10 days.
- \* Concurrent coccidiosis infection will lead to more severe disease and increase losses.
- \* Nematodirus is the dose limiting parasite for many wormers therefore under-dosing is very likely to result in treatment failures.
- \* **On most farms white drenches (e.g. Albex or Rycoben) should remain the drug of choice for treating Nematodirus.**
- \* **No anthelmintics have a persistent effect against Nematodirus.**



**For more information about Nematodirus, to devise the most appropriate parasite control plan for your flock or for a quote, please contact the surgery on 01729 823538**

### Mooooosive calfs!!! (translation = Massive calves!)

This season we have noticed an increase in calving difficulties due to big calves. There are a number of reasons for this, including the actual body size of the calf, the cow's own body condition and/or her pelvic size.

Nutrition, especially during the last few months of pregnancy, is a large factor in cow BCS and calf size. We suspect this has led to the increased number of large calves born this year. Last summer and backend was one of the best grass growing seasons for some time and in most cases the cattle were housed in good body condition. They were then fed the best silage made for a while. We are not wishing for worse weather conditions and we are certainly not for under-feeding cows during late pregnancy. There is very little to be achieved by altering the diet at this point. There is a lot of genetic information available for the pedigree animal, especially in the beef world, about calving ease. These EBV (estimated breeding values) are very useful to consider and an easy calving bull will certainly throw smaller calves. However, the bull can only influence 50% of these genetics as the cow contributes the other half. This can be problematic, as just looking at the size of a crossbred cow can not predict the size of the calf she could produce. Another consideration, especially if breeding heifer replacements, is the heifer from an easy calving bull may *not* be an easy calver herself. Different measurements for calving ease and maternal calving ease can differ fairly widely in the same animal. **Yes this does get complicated!**

Different systems are needed for different genetics. There is also research being done on genetic markers for calving ease. This has the potential to cause a lot of controversy and misinformation.



The cow's pelvic size is determined by genetics. It is possible to measure the pelvic space in a heifer and determine how big a calf she is likely to be able to calve. We have found it surprising when, on examining heifers, that the best grown animals are often the ones with the smallest pelvic spaces! We would all, on reflexion, put the biggest heifers to the bull first.

We, at Dalehead Veterinary Group Ltd, are able to provide a pre-bulling check on heifers, measuring pelvic size and assessing their maturity and breeding potential.

So in summary, to try to cut down cow and farmer trauma at calving time in terms of calving difficulties, we need to look at the genetics of our cattle, watch the nutrition of the mid to late pregnant cow and do pre-bulling checks on the heifers. We can talk to you in depth about your specific requirements, for more information or any queries, please give us a call on 01729 823538

### Health Plans – Red Tractor Farm Assurance

Not everybody is aware that it is now **necessary to have a vet review of health plans as part of the farm assurance scheme**. Many of the milk buyers are also moving in this direction and are requesting more and more detailed plans. Farms can fail the inspection if plans and the review are not in place. This is relevant in the dairy, beef *and* sheep sectors. In all plans, there are sections that are recommended and sections that are a requirement. These elements require us, as your vets, to review data from the farm – including lameness, mastitis etc as well as discussing worming policies and other health regimes.



The time needed by the farmer to provide the vets with this information is not inconsiderable and it is certainly more than a five minute job. The vets also need a substantial amount of time to review the information and complete the reports.

We are appealing to you to give us at least a couple of weeks notice before the farm inspection so the vets are not working to a short deadline.

These plans are now part of the farming life and we are happy to work with you to make it a useful and painless as possible process! We feel that reviewing your health strategies on a regular basis will help you and the practice focus on your farm's individual livestock issues and allow us to strengthen your existing practices and tackle emerging problems. If you have any queries or an upcoming farm assurance visit—please call us on 01729 823538

### TB Testing

As many of you may be aware, the way that government TB testing is administered nationally changed on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015. The administration of testing is to be handled by a private company, known as a **Delivery Partner** (DP) rather than the **APHA** (or DEFRA as they were previously called) The APHA will maintain an overview of testing and the disease situation.

Dalehead Veterinary Group Ltd are registered to TB test under this new administration, and therefore will automatically be instructed to test on our own client's farms. From our client's point of view, this reshuffle will change very little. The main implications arise from the Government enforcing a number of quality control assurances on the DP. These are there to ensure high standards of testing, health and safety and efficiencies. When a test is arranged, we have to notify the delivery partner in sufficient time of the time and date of the test, to allow them the opportunity to attend a certain number of tests to audit the standards mentioned above.

In order for us to plan efficiently, and to provide accurate times for the tests, **we need to be able to book testing well in advance, and obtain an estimate of how long the test is likely to take**. This will also allow us to group tests in certain areas on the same day. Please also ensure that there is the means for us to wash off and disinfect at all of the sites where we may be testing and also that the **handling facilities are suitable and safe on all sites**.

TB testing in some crushes, races and behind gates can be quite hazardous for us. Bruised and broken hands and fingers are not an uncommon occurrence amongst Vets whilst TB testing. It is important that the animal is restrained suitably and that we can get good access to the neck of the animal without having to reach between bars or over gates. A crush with a good, working yoke and side gate that allows access over the neck is ideal. If you are in doubt about the suitability of facilities for testing, then please speak to one of the farm vet team **before the test**.

