Campylobacter

Campylobacter foetus venerealis is one of the many potential causes of bovine infertility and abortions. It is transmitted from cow to bull to cow at serving.

Over the past few years, its incidence has been rising, particularly in beef suckler herds, because of a greater reliance on the use of hired bulls and a lack of basic biosecurity precautions.

In the cow, the organism lives in the anterior vagina and cervix. From here, it can invade the uterus causing endometritis and early embryonic death or later abortions.

SIGNS OF INFECTION

- slight, cloudy vaginal discharge about ten days after serving
- irregular and abnormally long intervals between heats
- poor pregnancy rates
- abortions at between five and seven months of gestation

Usually, given time, an infected cow will become immune and eliminate the infection.

This usually takes five or six months but occasionally may take longer.

In some cases, the endometritis and damage caused may be so severe that the cow remains infertile.

In the bull, the organism lives in the folds and crevices of the prepuce where it can persist for life.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosing of Campylobacter within a herd is not always easy.

Definite confirmation of infection is only made by culturing the organism from either prepuce or vaginal washings. Due to the delicate nature of the organism, false negative results may be obtained.

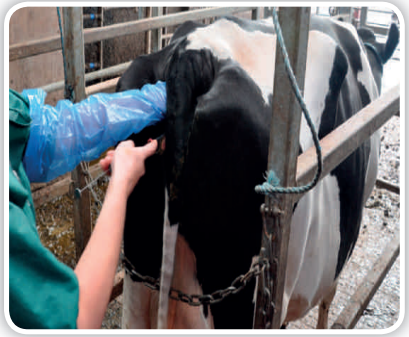
TREATMENT

Once the presence of Campylobacter has been confirmed, options for its control or elimination are limited.

APPLICATION

There are no licensed vaccines against this disease in the UK. If the organism can be isolated, a vaccine can be made (subject to obtaining the necessary licence). Vaccination will only allow the disease to be controlled not eliminated from the herd.

The only way of possibly eliminating this disease from an infected herd is to cull the bulls and use AI instead of natural service for at least three years.



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BIOSECURITY

Given the problems that Campylobacter can cause and the difficulty eliminating it from an infected herd, great care should be taken to prevent its introduction.

Ideally all replacement breeding stock, both heifers and bulls, should be virgins sourced only from reputable suppliers who will guarantee this.

Replacement bulls, if not virgins, should be subjected to a thorough sheath washing using an antibiotic solution on three consecutive days in an attempt to ensure they are not carrying the organism.

The use of hired bulls should be avoided. If this is not possible sheath washing becomes even more important.

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