

Fall in retention of BVD Positive cattle - AHWNI



Latest figures on Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) cases demonstrate the impact that BVD herd restrictions are having on infected farms across NI. The retention rate of BVD Positives has fallen considerably: at the start of March 2025, four herds had retained five BVD Positives for 28 days or longer. (The cut-off point after which herd restrictions are now applied is 28 days from disclosure of the BVD Positive result.) This compares to 11 retained BVD Positives in 8 herds at the start of February and 17 retained BVD Positives in 11 herds in early January.

From 1st May 2025, herd restrictions will be applied seven days after a BVD Positive or Inconclusive animal is disclosed, unless the animal is disposed of or in the event of a negative retest before the seven day period elapses. These restrictions affect all inward and outward moves, with the exception of moves to slaughter, and are also applied to associated herds. The aim of curtailing movements is to reduce the risk of virus transmission, and to drive down the length of time for which BVD Positive animals are kept on farm, as delays in removing Positives lead to not only a greater chance of the same farm having more Positives in the following season, but also a greater chance of neighbouring herds becoming infected. Veterinary advice is to dispose of Persistently Infected cattle as soon as possible, so that BVD can be eradicated from the NI cattle population.

From 1st June 2025, herd restrictions will be applied to those herds that have more than 20 cattle greater than 30 days of age of BVD Unknown (BVDU) status. Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI) is encouraging farmers to get all BVDU cattle tested as soon as possible, by using supplementary tags or by getting blood samples taken by a private vet. The reason for these herd restrictions is to prevent the BVD virus moving out of herds that have a potential reservoir of infection in untested cattle. All cattle born before the start of the compulsory scheme have now been assigned a BVDU status and require testing before being moved off the farm.

As infection levels decrease, a decrease occurs in the levels of natural immunity to BVD in herds. This means that the likelihood of pregnant cattle being exposed to the virus is decreasing but susceptibility to infection may increase because there is less natural exposure to the BVD virus. This reduction in immunity may leave some herds more exposed to large outbreaks should a PI animal be introduced. BVD vaccination induces a protective immunity in breeding animals to help avoid a range of negative outcomes of infection including failure to conceive, abortion, birth defects and most importantly the creation of calves that are persistently infected with BVD virus. The decision whether to vaccinate or not depends on the risk profile of the herd and should be discussed with the farm's veterinary surgeon.

Note for editors:

1. For any queries, please contact AHWNI at info@animalhealthni.com / 028 7963 9333.