

How to avoid BVD Herd Restrictions



With disclosure of BVD Positive or Inconclusive results bringing immediate movement restrictions to affected and associated herds since 1st February 2026, it is important to review what you are doing with your herd to reduce the risk of the infection being introduced. There are two critical components to this review: keeping the infection out and improving the immunity of your herd to the virus.

Keeping the infection out

To keep the infection out, it's important to be sure that animals being added to your herd have not only been directly BVD tested with a BVD Negative result, but also that they are not coming from a farm with current or recent infection in case they are transiently infected (although the commencement of immediate herd restrictions in breakdown herds will be reducing that risk). Transient infection of calves that have been infected after birth can last for approximately 3 weeks. If purchasing directly from another farm, and to determine the risk level, ask whether there has been BVD in the herd during the past 18 months and if there are currently positive animals on the premises.

Farmers selling livestock should ensure that only BVD Negative calves are sold from their herds. Purchasing or selling BVD Positive calves is illegal and could undermine BVD control by spreading the virus between herds. Where individuals operate their businesses by buying and selling calves, best returns are to be had by ensuring that calves have a great start to life and are as healthy and well managed as possible.

Speaking about the risks presented by the BVD virus, Dr Sam Strain CE of Animal Health & Welfare NI (AHWNI), stated, "One of the challenges of dealing with the BVD virus is that, early in life, some Persistently Infected (PI) calves (ie those that have been infected before birth) can appear to be normal for a time, before succumbing to other diseases. The BVD virus is an immunosuppressive virus, so the immune systems of infected calves do not have the capacity to 'fight off' other disease-causing agents, yet some of the calves can give the illusion that they are 'normal'.

"If any infected yet apparently normal calves were to be moved to another herd, they would set off a chain of events that could cause very significant animal health and financial issues for affected herds, as well as increased labour requirements and an emotional toll on the farmers whose animals are affected."

The BVD virus also needs to be prevented from entering by other routes: to reduce the risk of disease entering from neighbouring herds, boundaries should be stock-proof; and biosecurity needs to be excellent as the BVD virus can spread indirectly via visitors to the farm (in particular those who are working with animals), shared equipment and contaminated material from BVD infected animals.

Improving the immunity of your herd to the virus

On improving the immunity of herds to the virus, programmes manager at AHWNI Sharon Verner commented, "There are excellent vaccines available to protect herds from BVD. If your herd is not vaccinated, now is the time to discuss the risks to your herd with your private vet and decide whether a vaccination programme would be appropriate. Weigh up the cost of vaccinating the breeding females in your herd with the cost of losing a calf or calves. If you do proceed with vaccination, use the vaccines in line with manufacturers' recommendations, especially regarding timing, to get maximum immunity and the best return on the investment that you are making."

You can protect your herd from BVD, you can encourage others to do the right thing regarding PI calves, and in so doing you can play your part in freeing NI from the menace of BVD.

Note for editors:

1. AHWNI is responsible for the delivery of the Northern Ireland Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Eradication Scheme. For more information on the operation of the Scheme, please contact AHWNI (email info@animalhealthni.com, tel. 028 7963 9333) or visit the AHWNI website www.animalhealthni.com.

2. From 1st February 2026, herd restrictions are being applied immediately following a positive or inconclusive result. Restrictions will be lifted when 2 conditions are met:

(i) For BVDPs, 21 days have passed since the last BVDP animal has been removed from the herd and associated herds (that is, the BVDP animal has either been culled or re-tested with a BVD Negative result)

For BVDIs, the animal has been culled, or has re-tested BVD Negative

(ii) All animals in the herd and associated herds, except untested animals less than 31 days old, have a negative BVD status (BVDN or INDINEG status).

3. Herd restrictions will prohibit all moves into the herd, and all moves out except to direct slaughter or under Departmental licence, and also apply to associated herds.

4. From a point to be decided by DAERA, in newly disclosed BVDP herds, females aged 12 months and over will be individually restricted from 21 days after the date that the last BVDP has been removed from the herd. This is to reduce the risk of 'Trojan' moves (a pregnant animal that is carrying a BVD infected calf is referred to as a 'Trojan'). Breeding females will not be restricted individually in herds where an initial BVD Positive has had a Negative result on a follow up test, or where there were only BVD Inconclusive results.

5. Follow AHWNI on Meta (formerly Facebook) and X (formerly Twitter).