

AHWNI welcomes new milestone for NI's BVD Programme



For the first time, over 99% of the individual cattle in the NI population has a recognised BVD Negative status. Animal Health & Welfare NI (AHWNI) has welcomed this milestone, which has been achieved through the commitment of local farmers to see BVD eradicated and to comply with the Programme.

Developments of the Programme have seen efforts made to identify and deal with emerging and residual BVD infection. Since June 2026, herd restrictions have been applied when 5 or more cattle of unknown BVD status (BVDU) aged over 30 days of age have been present. (Movement restrictions are applied in these situations to prevent all moves in or out of a herd and any associated herds following 28 days' notice to the herd by DAERA.) This measure has contributed significantly to a decrease from 15,000 BVD Unknown (BVDU) status animals at the end of 2024, to under 7,000 at the start of August 2026.

BVD Positive animals have been identified in this population of previously untested animals, showing the importance of keeping testing up to date in a herd. Any delay in detection of the disease can have a serious effect on a herd if the virus spreads to naïve, early-in-calf females, as Persistently Infected calves will result, and the outbreak and consequential losses will be prolonged.

The aim of industry and the BVD Implementation Group which oversees the Programme is for BVD to be eradicated in NI, to improve animal health, to see lower production costs and a reduced need for antibiotic use. This new and landmark statistic denotes progress, which AHWNI wishes to see develop further, through stamping out the virus at the farm level.

For those herds that have BVD herd level restrictions due to the presence of BVD infection, the application of BVDFEM restrictions to individual females over 12 months of age can be dealt with in several ways, including the option of blood testing those females. The test that is carried out on the samples from BVDFEM animals is an 'antibody' test, in contrast to the 'virus antigen' test that is carried out on ear tissue samples taken at birth. A positive result to the antibody test does not mean that the animal is infected, but rather that it has either been exposed to the virus previously or has been vaccinated for BVD.

The BVDFEM restrictions are already preventing moves of possible 'Trojan' animals, thus limiting the spread of the virus into new herds, and protecting the population of cattle that currently have a BVD Negative status. Farmers and vets can contact AHWNI on 028 7963 9333 or at info@animalhealthni.com to discuss the testing requirements for possible derestriction of BVDFEM cattle and the circumstances in which the tests will be most beneficial.