AHWNI reports on prevented potential BVD Trojan moves



Animal Health & Welfare NI (AHWNI) has carried out an analysis to assess the impact of BVD restrictions on individual breeding females following herd breakdowns. The findings demonstrate a clear value in the efforts to prevent movements of potential 'Trojan' dams, that is, pregnant cows or heifers that may be carrying a BVD Persistently Infected foetus.

From March to September 2026, there have been 526 calves born to individually BVD-restricted (BVDFEM) dams, of which 97 calves returned BVD Positive results. At the time of analysis, 66 of the 526 calves were still untested, 61 of them more than 30 days of age. Based on the rate of seen in other calves of BVDFEM dams around 12 of these animals would be expected to be positive. Therefore, the BVDFEM status is identifying the pregnancies of highest BVD risk in NI: almost one in five calves born to these dams has been BVD Positive. AHWNI advises that calves of BVDFEM dams should be tagged promptly after birth (and samples tested as soon as possible after that) and kept apart from other cattle until a result is returned.

Proportionally, BVDFEM dams produced 0.19% of calves born since March 2026 but 14% of the PIs. The risk stays highest for around 4 months after the status is applied: 55 PIs out of 270 calves were born within 60 days (20%), 32 out of 134 calves were born 61–120 days later (24%), and 10 out of 122 calves were born after 120 days (8%). BVD Positive calves from BVDFEM dams came from 44 of the 90 herds where these dams have calved, with the greatest number of positive calves in a herd being 12.

The median gap from birth to a BVDP status for all BVD positive calves born since January 2025 is 18 days, and 90% are identified within 41 days. Ideally these time periods would be much shorter. Given the massive amount of viral excretion from BVD Positive calves, it is best to tag calves as soon as possible after birth and to submit samples to approved laboratories for testing at the earliest opportunity. Delayed detection of disease can allow the virus to spread to naïve, early-in-calf females, resulting in further BVD Positive calf births in the next season, with devastating impact.

Overall, calves of young dams and suckler cows are the most likely to be BVD Positive, and the risk of having a positive calf falls steadily with the dam's age. First-calving heifers are more likely to be exposed to the BVD virus for the first time while pregnant, often after mixing with other groups or bought-in stock, so vaccination of heifers before their first service can address this risk.

Controlling cattle movements from herds with active BVD infection is a vital part of the BVD eradication programme. 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.