



FACTSHEET

Bovine respiratory disease, often referred to as pneumonia, is a huge cost to the industry with losses mainly occurring from reduced growth rates, deaths and treatment costs.

There are many factors that affect the level of challenge to the animal:

Age – we tend to see pneumonia in young animals up to about 2 years old. Adult cattle are generally less susceptible

Stocking density – over stocking leads to very close contact, stress, lack of feed trough space and mucky beds

Mixing of groups – mixing cattle is like mixing children at school. They may all look healthy but they have no immunity to each others bugs and will all get a cold. This is exactly what we see when cattle are mixed.

Bedding – keeping the bedding dry provides a more comfortable place for the cattle to lie and makes it harder for bugs to survive.

Poor ventilation – the viral and bacterial causes of pneumonia can spread via droplets in the air. Poorly ventilated buildings lead to stale air contaminated with bugs being breathed in by the cattle increasing the challenge to them. We rarely see pneumonia in cattle kept outside.

Poor drainage – the bacteria and viral causes of pneumonia survive better in damp environments, so make sure guttering and drainage works well to give cattle a nice dry bed to lie on. Adult cows produce about 60L of water each day in urine, dung and on their breath. This all goes into the environment and needs to drain away.

Stress – when cattle are stressed their immune system doesn't work as well so they can succumb to the pneumonia bugs. Things like housing, weaning, castrating and dehorning are all very stressful for young cattle. We have a tendency to do these all at the same time and it's no wonder the calves then develop pneumonia.

Health status – other diseases such as BVD can affect the immune system and lead to the calf suffering from pneumonia.

Vaccination – there are many good pneumonia vaccines on the market that help to boost the animals' immune system so that it is ready to fight off the infection more successfully. Please talk to us about which vaccine will be most suitable for your cattle.

When you put all these factors together you end up with a young calf, bought at market, exposed to BVD, mixed with other young animals, housed too tightly in a poorly ventilated building with bad drainage and wet straw. It has just been weaned and is then dehorned and castrated as soon as it gets home. It's no wonder that an animal like this would develop pneumonia! The more management changes you can make to improve this situation the better.

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