Heading into summer

Managing three day sickness in dairy herds

Three Day Sickness, also known as Bovine Ephemeral Fever (BEF), is a viral disease of cattle with the potential to cause economic losses to dairy producers through cattle deaths, loss of condition, weight loss, reduced fertility in bulls and decreased milk production. It can affect cattle of all ages and is more prevalent after summer rainfall periods as it is spread through biting insects. The impact can be worse after prolonged dry periods as herd immunity is reduced.

Symptoms to watch for

Dairy farmers are urged to monitor their cattle daily for signs of BEF, which include:

- Lethargy and a dull appearance
- Drooling and difficulty swallowing
- Lameness and stiffness
- High fever and muscle pain, causing cattle to separate from the herd, go off their feed, and seek shade and water.
- A sudden drop in milk production and reduced rumination may be the first signs of sickness in lactating cows where individual cow monitoring is in place.

Most affected animals recover but lactating cows may not return to peak lactation. Death losses are typically around 1%, but losses as high as 5-10% have been reported in some mobs. In some cases, the virus can cause pregnant cows to abort, and bulls may experience temporary infertility for up to six months. The virus can also cause nervous system damage, leaving some cattle paralysed and unable to stand or result in a staggery gait.

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Young, lighter cattle usually show mild symptoms lasting 1-3 days, while heavier cattle, including bulls and cows, may require additional care. If cattle remain down for an extended period, veterinary assistance should be sought. Anti-inflammatory and fever-reducing medications, available through your private veterinarian, can aid in recovery. Calcium injections also aid recovery as hypocalcaemia can occur due to fever and inflammation.

Steps to support affected cattle:

- Provide shade, water, and hay but do not force them to eat or drink.
- If cattle are unable to stand, roll or lift them twice daily to prevent muscle damage.
- Cattle may bloat and have difficulty swallowing. Position down cattle so that their head is uphill of their abdomen to reduce risk of inhalation pneumonia.

Farmers are also advised not to send recently recovered cattle to abattoirs for several weeks to allow muscle recovery and avoid potential downgrades. If medications have been administered, ensure withholding periods are observed.

Preventative actions

Working with a trusted veterinarian or adviser, producers should have a BEF strategy for their herd to decide the best ways to manage the BEF risk to their animals. Herds can be vaccinated prior to higher risk times with the BEF vaccination with calves vaccinated from 6 months of age.

BEF Vaccination		
1st Dose	**2nd Dose**	**Booster**
Heifers and Steers	2 weeks to 6 months after the 1st dose	Prior to risk period every year
Bulls more than 6 months old	2 weeks to 6 months after the 1st dose	Prior to risk period every year
Dairy Cows	2 weeks to 6 months after the 1st dose	Prior to risk period every year

BEF vaccination guide. Source Zoetis Australia Nov 2016



Resources and further assistance

For additional information, dairy farmers can access resources from:

Local Land Services: Bovine Ephemeral Fever (Three Day Sickness)-

Business Queensland

Flyboss

Dairy Australia: Nursing Down Cattle



Hard Working Protection for Cattle – Zoetis Australia