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## Cumberland News Article June 2013

### Schmallenberg Disease vaccination- to do or not to do?

That is the question!

A vaccine against this disease has recently been authorised. It has been researched and produced and licensed in double quick time following pressure from British cattle and sheep vets.

Some background information.

#### What is the disease?

Autumn 2011 - virus first identified in Germany hence its name.

- it was shown to be spread by midges

January 2012 - evidence of infection found in the UK

February 2013 - every county in England and Wales has tested positive

March 2013 - tests in Scotland positive

May 2013 - Bovilis SBV vaccine licensed

#### What does it do?

The midge picks up infection after feeding on an infected animal and then spreads it to the next animal it feeds on. An infected animal has the virus in the blood for up to 7 days. It then mounts an immune response to the virus and becomes resistant to the disease.

However the virus can get into the calf or lamb if she is at a certain stage of pregnancy. The risk periods are infection with the virus at 2-3 months pregnancy in sheep and 3-5 months in cattle.

The principle effect is that of late abortion and deformed calves and lambs.

The main deformity is of fixed joints which cannot be bent. The result of this is difficult lambings and calvings which may involve your vet doing a caesarean or 'embryotomy'. This is cutting up the dead lamb or calf and removing it in pieces.

It can also cause a mild to moderate disease in cattle for up to a week with high temperature, milk drop and diarrhoea.

It is possible that the virus can cause early abortions and infertility in cattle but this has not been proven.

#### What are the losses?

Sorry if this sounds like doom and gloom! DEFRA have actually declared the disease as one of a relatively low impact in most flocks and herds. However some flocks have had up to 30-40% losses of lambs in the south.

In Cumbria, there have been confirmed cases of Schmallenberg lambs and calves in most of the county starting in November 2012.

Most but not all of the bulk milk samples we had tested in late 2012 were also positive but we haven't seen a confirmed case of abortion or malformed calf in our practice.

#### Should you vaccinate?

The disease is clearly moving north via the midge population and all the farms in our area will be at risk.

The risk period is early pregnancy so the timing of tugging and serving of cows has a big effect on whether disease is likely or not. The midge season is probably May through to September/ October but this is highly weather dependant. Some infections have even

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occurred mid winter and these cannot be easily explained. This means that there is a risk all year round.

As the vaccine has just been released, much is not known yet as the trial work is ongoing:-

- 1) It is not licensed for pregnant animals (though 'probably safe' according to the company)
- 2) It is not licensed for breeding males (though again 'probably safe')
- 3) The duration of immunity is not known

#### How do I vaccinate?

The vaccine should be given before tugging or bulling. Cows need 2 doses 4 weeks apart and sheep one dose. The vaccine course should be finished 3 weeks before service. The vaccine can not be given with other vaccines.

So the biggest risk would be expected to be early lambing flocks (therefore 2-3 months pregnant during the midge season). There should be less risk if the tup goes in after October. Also any cows 3, 4 or 5 months pregnant during the midge season are at risk. I reckon that this means that the only 'safe' cows would be those calving June, July and August. Dairy cattle tend to calve all year round and sucklers either autumn or spring, so most cows will be susceptible.

The vaccine cost is on a par with other cattle and sheep vaccines.

In the south those farmers who have had heavy losses have said they will vaccinate 'whatever the cost'. Understandably, vaccine take up has been higher in the south as they have seen more evidence of disease.

You will have to decide yourself in conjunction with your vet whether vaccination is needed for your flock or herd. If your farm's main product is the suckler calf or lamb then vaccination is probably more justified.

Also as things stand it will be difficult to get 2 injections into newly calved dairy cows 4 weeks apart with the second one 3 weeks pre service. Cattle running with the bull should not be vaccinated as it is not licensed for pregnant cattle.

However, as research continues it will probably be found to be safe and effective to vaccinate pregnant cows and breeding males at any stage, and boost annually (as it is with most vaccines), but we cannot advise this at the moment.

I hope this isn't too confusing! To summarise, have a chat with your own vet about your need to vaccinate. The bad news is that the disease is likely to get worse in our area, but the good news is that it has been of low impact so far and that a vaccine is now available to help.