

Redwater Fever

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Babesiosis (Redwater fever)

This parasitic disease is usually first reported in May/June when its tick host first becomes active.

What is Babesiosis?

Babesiosis is an infection of the red blood cells by a single cell parasite of the genus *Babesia*. In the UK, babesiosis is usually caused by *Babesia divergens*. The disease is spread between cattle by ticks (*Ixodes ricinus* in the UK). The *Babesia* is injected into the bloodstream by the tick and then invades the red blood cells and begins dividing, eventually rupturing the cell. Clinical signs begin around 2 weeks after infection.

Babesiosis is rare except in known tick areas. However in these areas even though disease is often relatively mild there is a significant impact on productivity and fertility in affected cattle.

Clinical Signs

- Increased temperature
- Diarrhoea which ceases after around 36 hours and then becomes constipation
- Red urine (due to haemoglobin produced by the rupture of the red blood cells) which becomes darker with time
- Increased pulse rate
- Abortion of pregnant cows
- Death is rare in babesiosis in the UK

Diagnosis

- On the clinical signs described above
- Recent movement to pastures known to harbour ticks
- Blood smears can show up the parasite

Treatment

- Mild cases may recover without treatment.
- More severe cases need treatment. This is often best combined with a preventative treatment for the as yet unaffected cattle. This choice is best made on an individual farm basis in consultation with your vet.

Prevention

- Identification of risk areas
- Prophylactic treatment of cattle about to be moved to a risk area
- Tick control
- Vaccine not yet available in UK

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