



## Footbathing and Control of Digital Dermatitis

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Most dairy farmers in the UK are now only too familiar with digital dermatitis (DD) as a cause of lameness. Once in a herd there is no reliable way to eradicate DD yet but it is possible to control it. Those in the fortunate position of being clear of DD should make every effort to remain that way. This needs close attention to herd biosecurity.

#### Prevention:

The biggest risk for bringing DD into a 'clean' herd is the movement of stock on and off the farm as many farms don't check the feet or footbath animals coming into the herd. Ideally the feet of purchased cattle (cows or bulls) should be treated with antibiotic by footbathing or spraying, quarantined for a minimum of 2 weeks and footbathed again before mixing with other stock.

DD can also potentially be spread by foot trimmers and veterinarians unless all possible hygiene measures are taken to clean and disinfect knives and other equipment.

There is also a possibility that the same organism that is responsible for DD in cattle causes contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD) in sheep too, so co-grazing and overwintering sheep on cattle pasture could potentially spread DD.

#### Control:

The best way to control DD is to **keep cows clean** and to **footbath regularly**.

Footbathing should be considered a means of controlling lameness rather like teat dipping is used to prevent mastitis. Ideally it should be carried out in the same routine manner, the frequency depending on the level of infectious lameness in the herd.

Footbaths must be:

- Used regularly, as frequently as the DD challenge demands (e.g. after each milking or weekly)
- Easy to set-up and clean out without adding more than 10 minutes to the milking routine.
- Far enough from the parlour so as not to disrupt cow flow and slow down milking.

- Used with a pre-wash (hose or preferably bath) to reduce contamination of solution.
- Solution should be at least 10cm deep.
- Have somewhere clean for the cows to stand after going through the footbath.

DD thrives in damp, dirty conditions so keep passageways clean and minimise cow contact with slurry. Cows which are kept clean and dry are 20 times less likely to get DD. Keep cubicles clean and comfortable too to encourage lying and don't overstock (more cows than cubicles increase lameness risk).

Trim cow's feet at least once a year. This limits both claw horn and infectious lameness provided that the cows are trimmed by someone trained in trimming techniques. Trimming by untrained staff can do more harm than good.

For any control programme you need to know if it is working or not. At very least this means knowing how many lame cows you have and why they are lame. Take time to watch your cows walk on an even, non-slip surface. Make a note of which animals are lame and find out why. Lame cows should be either treated promptly and appropriately or culled. Knowing the levels of lameness in a herd is essential if you are to know whether your control strategies work.

**Good biosecurity and maintaining good footbathing routines are the most important for preventing and controlling DD.**

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