



# Tern Vets Ltd

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PUTTING CARE INTO PRACTICE

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## OFFICE HOURS:

Mon-Fri 08.30-18.00

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Your dedicated farm  
team available 24/7



## WINTER MASTITIS WOES

Early lactation can be one of the most common times (and frustrating times) for cows to suffer with mastitis. She changes groups, housing and diet at a time when their immune system is at a natural low and they are reaching peak yields. Research shows that 60% of all mastitis cases in early lactation originates from infections picked up in the dry period.

The dry period is a good time for the cow to deal with any **current** udder infections with the help of a dry cow antibiotic tube, and the formation of a keratin plug to seal the teat end to prevent new infections (in most herds this is aided by a teat sealant) so she can calve in next lactation with an uninfected udder. There are a number of factors which affect the success of a dry period:

- Drying off technique
- Milk yield at drying off
- Choice of antibiotic tube for infected versus uninfected cows
- Use of a teat sealant
- Type, cleanliness & stocking density of dry cow accommodation

**Aim for no more than 1 in 12 cows calving in to get a case of mastitis each month. Any more than this and we need to look closely at the dry period performance.**

Many dry cows in winter will be housed and calve down on straw yards so the environment becomes critical to prevent new infections.

- Straw bedded dry cow yards should be cleaned out at least every 3 weeks (if you worry about grip for calving cows then a thin base of sand can work well)
- Each dry cow needs 10m<sup>2</sup> bedded area - measure up your dry cow shed and see how many should fit in there! If you increase stocking density you must increase bedding frequency to off-set the risk.

This photo was taken by one of our vets and shows the high stocking densities that can be found in some dry cow straw yards. Also note the volume of clean straw.



# Heat Detection:

Efficient and profitable performance of a dairy herd requires conscientious heat detection and proper timing of artificial insemination. Failure to detect oestrus or “heat” is a major factor contributing to low fertility. Approximately half of all heats are undetected on dairy farms in the UK. In addition, research based on levels of the hormone progesterone in milk shows that up to 15% of the cattle presented for insemination are not actually in heat. Failure to detect cows that **are** in heat plus breeding cows **not** in heat result in economic loss for the producer because of extended calving intervals and additional semen expense.



When we investigate poor fertility on farm, heat detection in almost all cases is where the biggest gains can be made. Over the next few months we will cover signs of heat, factors affecting heat behaviour, tips for improving heat detection, timing of AI and ways to monitor heat detection on your farm.

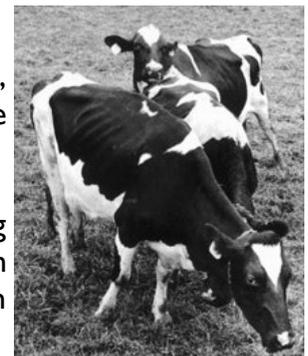
## **Signs of Heat:**

### **Primary signs**

A cow standing, being mounted is the most accurate sign of heat. *Standing heat* is the most sexually intensive period of the cycle. Cows that move away quickly when a mount is attempted are not in true heat. The average duration of standing heat is 15 to 18 hours, but heat duration may vary from 8 to 30 hours among cows. A cow in heat usually stands to be mounted 20 to 55 times during her heat. Each mount lasts three to seven seconds.

### **Secondary signs**

Secondary signs vary in duration and intensity. These signs may occur before, during, or after standing heat and are **not** related to time of ovulation. These are signs/clues to watch the specific cow more closely for standing behavior.



#### **1. Mounting Other Cows**

Cattle that exhibit this behavior may be in heat or approaching heat. Mounting activity is performed much less frequently by cows in mid-cycle. Although mounting cannot be used as a true primary sign of heat, cows exhibiting such behaviour should be watched closely for true standing heat.

#### **2. Mucus Discharge**

Increased oestrogen levels causes mucus to be produced in the cervix and accumulates with other fluids in the vagina before, during, and shortly after heat. You may see long viscous, clear elastic strands of mucus can hang from the vulva.

#### **3. Bellowing, Restlessness, and Trailing**

Cows in heat are more restless and alert to their surroundings. When allowed to interact with other cattle, cows coming into heat and cows in heat persistently trail behind to try to mount other cows. Prior to and during heat, they remain standing and alert while their herdmates are lying down and resting.

#### **4. Rubbed Tailhead Hair and Dirty Flanks**

As a consequence of being ridden, the hair on the tailhead and rump is fluffed-up, rubbed, or matted, and the skin may be exposed. The legs and flanks may be smeared with mud or manure.

#### **5. Chin Resting and Back Rubbing**

Prior to mounting, cows often rest or rub their chin on the rump or back of the cow to be mounted. This application of pressure may be considered a test for receptivity to being mounted. Both cows should be observed closely for mounting and standing behaviour.

#### **6. Metestrous Bleeding**

Some cows and most heifers have a bloody mucus discharge one to three days after heat. This discharge indicates that the cow was in heat and does not mean that she failed to hold. However, such animals should be watched closely for a return to heat in 18 or 19 days.

**NEXT MONTH:**

**FACTORS AFFECTING THE EXPRESSION OF HEAT BEHAVIOUR**