TREATMENT OF DIGITAL DERMATITIS:
USING FOOTBATHS

Digital dermatitis is a disease that can spread rapidly through a herd, resulting in over 30% of cattle affected. Foot-bathing is a quick way of treating large numbers of cattle. Ask your vet for advice as to which footbath product is best for you to use.

Advantages of footbaths

- Quicker and cheaper than individual treatment
- Deals with all cases of digital dermatitis, including those just developing and those that might be missed unless the feet were picked up

Disadvantages of footbaths

- Less predictable results than individual treatment
- Disposal of large volumes of solution needs to be done carefully following the appropriate regulations

Footbathing is a simple, effective way of treating digital dermatitis. However, to maximise the benefit it is important to follow a few simple rules.
FOOTBATH REGIME:

- The cows’ feet must be cleaned before they enter the treatment footbath
  For farms with relatively clean feet a two-footbath system with a water-filled footbath before the treatment footbath may be sufficient. However, on most farms, hosing the feet will significantly improve the response to treatment
- Contamination of the footbath with faeces will significantly reduce its effectiveness
  Clean the footbath completely before using it. A two-footbath system will reduce contamination, as will straw in the footbath. A padded footbath allows faeces removal, preventing contamination of the solution
- Ensure that cows stand in the footbath for at least 15 seconds
  Shorter periods of time will significantly reduce effectiveness
- Hold the cows on clean concrete after treatment until the feet have dried
  Putting cows back onto slurry will negate the benefits. The cows’ accommodation should be as clean as possible before the cows return
- For effective control, repeated footbaths are required
  A single footbath treatment may improve the incidence of digital dermatitis, but to maintain this improvement repeated footbaths are essential. Ask your vet for advice as to the best regime for your farm. Completely change the solution frequently. No more than 200 cows should be put through a 200L footbath, and the solution should be changed each time it is used
- Do not cut costs by reducing the concentration of the product
  Straw in the footbath will reduce the amount of product required as will padded footbaths

As with most other diseases, prevention is better than cure. See Factsheet 222 on prevention of digital dermatitis.

MORE INFORMATION

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MDC Research Into Practice Booklet No. 56: Digital dermatitis in dairy cows.

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