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Liver tumours

Primary liver tumours are unusual in cattle but when they do occur they can obstruct bile flow. They should be considered in cows showing signs of icterus (jaundice) and photosensitisation. In one survey of liver tumours in adult cattle 40/66 were hepatocellular carcinomas, 10/66 were hepatocellular adenomas and a further 10/66 were cholangiocellular tumours.

Less frequently seen liver tumours include haemangiosarcoma, haemangioma, fibroma and Schwannoma.

The frequency of liver tumours is quite low and two surveys of slaughtered cattle revealed a 0.09% incidence of liver tumours of hepatic origin and 0.0028% incidence of primary liver tumours respectively.

Clinical signs

The clinical signs associated with primary liver tumours depend on whether bile flow is disrupted when icterus and photosensitisation can be expected. The dermatitis caused by photosensitisation is frequently more severe on muzzle and teats.

Hepatic insufficiency associated with sepsis

This syndrome is seen in lactating cows following an acute septic mastitis or metritis and the initial clinical signs are very similar to those of endotoxaemia. Later on the clinical signs are those of anorexia, weight loss and reduced milk production. Affected cows have increased serum levels of liver enzymes.

It is therefore prudent to consider this entity in the initial management of cows with postpartum sepsis.

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