Maintaining a BVD free herd depends on preventing the birth of PI (persistently infected) calves once existing PI cattle have been removed. The primary focus of BVD vaccination strategies is therefore to protect female breeding cattle during pregnancy in order to prevent the birth of PI calves.

Bulls are not the primary focus of BVD vaccination programmes, but they can play a significant role in the spread of BVD virus, so they should not be forgotten. Bought in bulls can be an opportunity for BVD to enter an otherwise closed herd.

The following should be considered when bringing a bull into a herd:

- A bull might be a PI. Purchased bulls should always be tested for BVD virus before entry to the herd.
- A bull that has tested negative for BVD virus might pick up a transient BVD infection from other animals at a sale or in transit. Contracting a transient BVD infection may affect sperm quality for several months, in addition to potentially bringing BVD virus into a herd. Even bulls that have been tested negative before sale should be isolated on arrival and re-tested for BVD virus.
- On rare occasions, if a bull acquires a transient BVD infection around the time of puberty, the virus can get remain in the testicles. This result is a bull that is negative for virus on a blood test, but is carrying BVD virus in his semen. Ideally, incoming bulls should have a fertility test that includes testing a semen sample for BVD virus.

It makes sense to protect bulls from BVD infection. No BVD vaccine has been licensed in the UK for use in breeding bulls, however under the “cascade” system, vets can recommend using vaccines that are licensed for cows. Recent work on live vaccine use in young male calves showed no dissemination of vaccine virus to male reproductive tissues, but this was not in bulls at time of breeding.

Anyone buying or selling a bull through a market would be wise to ensure that the bull is fully protected against contracting a transient infection. Many breed societies stipulate that bulls should be both tested free of BVD and vaccinated before shows or sales. When checking a bull’s vaccination status, it’s important to check that the full primary course has been given correctly, in sufficient time before the show or sale. A vaccine with a single shot primary course makes this more straight-forward.

When herd vaccination is used to protect against BVD infection, the bull should be protected in addition to cows and heifers. An unprotected bull risks contracting BVD through, for example, contact with neighbouring cattle.

When vaccinating bulls, it’s advisable to ensure that the vaccination causes the least possible stress to the bull, and that it won’t cause pyrexia, particularly if close to the breeding season. For some show animals, a vaccine with a low risk of injection site reaction would also be an advantage.

Speak to your vet to ensure your BVD control programme is robust, and provides complete protection for your whole herd.
Bovela is the only one-shot primary course BVD vaccine licensed in the UK

Vaccine compliance is typically low across UK farms, with timing being a key aspect of this\(^2\)

Multiple handling and re-gathering means stress for stock and workers

Bovela offers flexibility of vaccination timing as well as a full 12 months’ foetal protection

Bovela is the only BVD vaccine available in the UK that also confers full protection against BVD type 2, an emerging threat in Europe

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References:

Advice on the use of Bovela or other therapies should be sought from your veterinary surgeon. Bovela contains Modified live BVDV*-1, non-cytopathic parent strain KE-9: \(10^{14.0–10^{6.0}}\text{TCID}_5\)**, Modified live BVDV*-2, non-cytopathic parent strain NY-93: \(10^{14.0–10^{6.0}}\text{TCID}_5\)**. *Bovine viral diarrhoea virus **Tissue culture infectious dose 50%*. UK: POM-V. Further information available in the SPC or from Boehringer Ingelheim Limited, Vetmedica, Bracknell, Berkshire, RG12 8YS, UK. Email: vetmedica.uk@boehringer-ingelheim.com. Date of preparation: May 2016. AHD9265.

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