



# It seems like the livestock “pneumonia season” started earlier than usual this year!

In a ‘normal’ Northeast weather year, as we move from the frigid wintery season into the spring season, the risk of respiratory illness in livestock (particularly those that are held in close confinement) generally increases but, this year, things are a little different.

Given the unusually warm winter we have been experiencing, along with significant temperature swings, some farmers and others who own livestock may have had to deal with an early and more difficult time preparing for the “pneumonia season”. It’s hard to know how to manage a barn environment when the outdoor temperature changes 20-30 F in a matter of hours or, the occasional below zero streak of days runs right into above freezing weather!

There are three things that impact an animal’s health – Environment, Immune Status and Disease Agent. Any one of these things can override the effects of the other two, for example, a heavy load of “bugs” can overpower a healthy immune status and cause disease or, a poor immune status can be overwhelmed by low level of “bugs”, even in a good environment.

An extremely important part of minimizing the risk to your herd from respiratory disease starts with a plan put together through conversation with your herd veterinarian and other subject matter experts. Broadly speaking, some of the things you will want to include in your conversation about limiting the impact of herd diseases (such as respiratory disease) during risky and stressful times of year, include:

## ➤ **Environment - Ventilation**

- Poor or inadequate ventilation will overcome almost any management tool you use to limit the risk of respiratory disease in your herd.
  - Remember, you work in the same environment as your livestock, poor air quality can negatively affect (mostly for other reasons) human health as well.
- Talk to your veterinarian and/or other building/ventilation experts on methods to maintain proper ventilation in your barn(s)—year round.
- Have your building ventilation system evaluated by an expert. Keep in mind that older barns are particularly difficult to keep properly ventilated.

➤ **Immune Status - Vaccination**

- A well vaccinated herd is a critically important part of any plan to minimize the risk of respiratory disease to your livestock.
  - Work closely with your herd veterinarian to develop a vaccination routine that best meets your management needs.
  - There are many vaccines on the market – Killed, Modified Live and Intranasal. You should use veterinary guidance about which ones to purchase and how to best use them.
- Help your animals maintain a strong immunity through good nutrition and low stress
  - Animals will need to increase feed intake during colder months.

➤ **Disease Agent – Respiratory Pathogens**

- There are many different “bugs” that can cause or contribute to respiratory disease including virus, bacteria and parasites. Good management can help lessen environmental pathogen numbers thereby reducing chances of exposure.
- Some pathogens are transmitted through nose to nose (direct) contact so, overcrowding, can increase the likelihood of exposure to disease causing ‘bugs’ because of an environment that is more difficult to clean and poor air quality.

➤ **Biosecurity - Take precautions if you bring new animals into your herd**

- While it is not always possible to avoid introducing new animals into your herd, if you have to:
  - Consult with your herd veterinarian **beforehand**
  - Try to avoid doing so during times of high risk/stress
  - Be sure you know the health status of the source herd/flock
  - Insure that the source herd and your herd have been **properly vaccinated** before adding outside additions
  - Test incoming animals for carrier virus status (ck with vet)
  - Isolate new herd animals, away from your herd animals, for an appropriate period of time (ck with vet).
    - Isolation should include feeding and watering routines/equipment
- Limit & control access to your farm
- Do not comingle livestock species (e.g. sheep and cattle)
- Control pests and vermin

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