



7 tips to reduce a pinkeye outbreak in your herd

Pinkeye is a serious disease that can cause discomfort and, in some cases, even blindness. The cost of the disease is not just the cost of treatment but also the economic impact of reduced weight gain and/or decreased milk production.

Pinkeye, also called infectious bovine keratoconjunctivitis (IBK), is a common disease that is not typically fatal, but is highly contagious. Younger cattle that have never been exposed to the bacteria are the most likely to get this disease. Several factors increase the risk of pinkeye and contribute to its spread in a herd. For the health and well-being of the animal and the farmer's bottom line, prevention is the best offense to keep pinkeye at bay.

Pinkeye prevention checklist

1. *Watch for early signs of pinkeye* – Check for pinkeye at least every other day during the fly season. The first thing you might notice in your cattle could be a swelling or redness of the conjunctiva and frequent blinking. In a couple of days, a small ulcer may appear in the center of the eye. In less than a week the entire cornea may become cloudy, and the ulcer enlarged. The cornea ruptures in extreme cases.

If the cornea doesn't rupture, healing occurs over time, but the animal may have a large scar that contributes to blindness or partial blindness. Not every animal will respond the same way with a variation in the overall appearance or rate of progression. The key to recovery is catching clinical signs early.

2. *Provide shade for your herd* – Cattle become more susceptible to the diseases when ultraviolet light from the sun causes irritation. White-faced cattle with no pigment around their eyes are at an increased risk for irritation and pinkeye. That's why it is important to provide a space where animals can get out of direct sunlight.
3. *Control face flies* - The primary infectious agents for pinkeye are the bacterium *Moraxella bovis* (*M. bovis*) and *Moraxella bovoculi* (*M. bovoculi*). Face flies spread the disease as they feed around eyes and nostrils.

Face flies can also irritate the eye by causing small scratches on the corneas and conjunctiva (membrane covering part of the front surface of the eye and the inner surface of the eyelids), allowing the *M. bovis* organisms to attach to the tissue and thrive. The infected eyes water and the secretions attract more flies.

Many methods are available to control flies including fly tags, sprays, and dust. Feed-through growth regulators have targeted ingredients that pass through cow's system and affect the fly larvae in manure, breaking the life cycle and reducing the fly population.

The diseased eye can also be protected either with an eye patch or suturing the eye closed temporarily. This will help keep out flies, dust, and sunlight.

4. *Keep pastures trimmed and minimize irritants of tall grasses and weeds* - Weeds and brush can also irritate the eye area. Eyes can be scratched or irritated when cattle eat from the middle of large bales of hay. Spread the hay out instead of making the cattle reach for round bales or an overhead feeder. Other irritants include dust, pollen, and chaff.
5. *Isolate infected cattle to reduce the spread of disease* - Pinkeye is extremely contagious, so removing infected animals from the rest of the herd and treating them as soon as possible is a key factor in breaking the disease cycle.
6. *Implement a vaccination program* - *M. bovis* vaccines can be administered before the beginning of fly season (at least 6 to 8 weeks prior and follow booster requirements) to ensure immunity has been established before the threat emerges.

BOVILIS® PILIGUARD® Pinkeye vaccine by Merck Animal Health has a long-standing reputation and has been shown effective against pinkeye in cattle. It is available for use in healthy cattle against infection by *M. bovis* strains. Vaccinating a herd with BOVILIS PILIGUARD Pinkeye vaccine has been shown effective against infections and can reduce the severity of infections when outbreaks occur.

Another option to take the stress out of pinkeye is with a combination vaccine like BOVILIS® 20/20 VISION® 7 with SPUR®, which offers the trusted clostridial disease effectiveness of BOVILIS® VISION® 7 with SPUR® against clostridial disease and pinkeye caused by *M. bovis* in one convenient dose.

7. *Consult with your veterinarian* – Work closely with your veterinarian to develop a program tailored to your operation and remember a broad-based approach that includes vaccination, fly control and pasture management is best.

Take-home message

Pinkeye can be a challenge to treat, especially if producers are not accustomed to handling cattle on a regular basis. And, on some farms, a chute might not be available to treat pinkeye, so prevention is paramount to reducing the risk of disease from either entering or spreading through a herd. The best way to manage pinkeye is to get ahead of it and stay ahead of it.