

Bovine Ulcerative Mammillitis in Cattle

Bovine ulcerative mammillitis is contagious skin disease causing severe ulcerations of the teat skin and the udder. It is caused by Bovine herpes virus 2 (BHV-2). Once a cow is infected with the virus, she will remain infected for life and may shed the virus during periods of stress.

The virus is usually introduced into herds by the introduction of carrier animals or by biting insects.

In dairy herds the virus can be spread between cows in the milking shed when infected cows are milked, and the virus remains on the cups when applied to an unaffected cow.

Outbreaks can occur in cattle herds (mainly first calvers), with up to 30% of a herd can become infected. The virus spreads slowly through the herd over a 2–7-week period. The incubation period is 5-10 days.

Initially the affected teats develop painful red swellings that progress to form fluid-filled vesicles, which rupture to become ulcers and thick plaques approximately 0.5-2cm in diameter. Some plaques may coalesce to involve large areas that extend up to the teat base or involve the entire udder, perineum and vulva. Eventually extensive sloughing of skin occurs, followed by scab formation. Scabs may cover the teat orifice and interfere with milking.

If beef cows with calves at foot are affected, they may not allow their calves to nurse due to the discomfort and the mouths of nursing calves might be affected. Calves may need to be supplemented with milk replacer.

Diagnosis of the condition is usually based on the typical lesion seen on the affected cows.

Treatment is supportive and non-specific. The application of iodophor teat disinfection and emollient udder cream can increase healing of skin.

In dairy herds it is recommended to milk affected cows last, wash udder and apply iodophor teat disinfection to reduce the spread in the herd. Milking equipment should be disinfected. Affected cows should be monitor for mastitis and severely affected cows may need to be dried off early.

