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Footrot (Interdigital Necrobacillosis)

Footrot (also known as Interdigital Necrobacillosis) is an infectious disease of cattle characterised by a necrotising infection of the interdigital skin.

Footrot is caused by two bacterial species *Fusobacterium necrophorum* and *Porphyromonas levii*, which spread rapidly into the soft tissues, causing the characteristic swelling of the affected area.

The bacteria can reside in heavily soiled and muddy areas in yards, cow sheds, tracks and around water troughs. Trauma and wet conditions lead to damage to the skin in the interdigital space allowing the bacteria to enter and cause infection.

All breeds of cattle of any age are susceptible to footrot. Cattle with footrot present with sudden onset of lameness and swelling in the affected foot. The interdigital swelling increases over 36 to 72 hours after onset of lameness. There is often a foul-smelling discharge.

As footrot it is a painful condition, appetite is reduced, and loss of body condition occurs. Milking cows often have reduced milk production and bulls may be temporarily infertile.

Diagnosis is based on the classic clinical presentation of sudden onset of lameness and swelling +/- a foul-smelling discharge in the affected foot's interdigital space.

Treatment consists of an antibiotic course, Procaine Penicillin is the antibiotic of choice, and an anti-inflammatory course to reduce the pain and inflammation.

Prevention of footrot involves making improvements in the areas around gateways, troughs and laneways, to allow proper drainage and to reduce the risk of traumatic injury to the foot and interdigital area.

Reference material: Parkinson, T. J., Vermunt, J. J., & Malmo, J. (2019). Diseases of cattle in Australasia: a comprehensive textbook. New Zealand Veterinary Association Foundation for Continuing Education. Massey University Press, Auckland, 0745, New Zealand.