

# Lumpy Skin Disease

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24 March 2014

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**In the recent past local media has been awash with reports of lumpy skin disease wreaking havoc in different parts of the country. The Chronicle of 29 January 2014 reported of deaths amounting to 50 head of cattle in Masvingo province whilst 617 were said to have contracted the disease. The Zimmail of 3 March 2014 reported of 72 recorded deaths at Chingwizi camp in Mwenzi District. Given the fact that the outbreak affected all provinces in the country it is therefore not difficult to see the impact disease has had on the beef industry and the economy at large. Statistics clearly show that lumpy skin disease despite the fact that it has always been around for some time now, most farmers have not mustered the art of preventing this disease or at least managing its effects in the unfortunate event that it strikes. This article seeks to better your understanding and consequently the management of this highly infectious disease.**

Lumpy skin disease is an infectious skin disease of cattle which is caused by a pox virus. The virus is transmitted from an infected animal to an uninfected one by blood sucking insects. It can also be spread from one animal to the other through direct contact with an affected animal. Calves can contract the disease through ingesting milk from an infected cow. In Zimbabwe the virus has been known to take two distinct forms, that is the mild and the virulent forms. When lumpy disease strikes it can affect up to 50 percent of the herd and if the disease is not managed well up to 10 percent of the herd can succumb to lumpy skin disease.

## **Signs and Symptoms**

When the virus enters the body of the animal it takes 14 -28 days incubation period before the animal starts to show elaborate symptoms of ill-health. Thereafter sets in a rise in body temperature (40°C or even higher). This fever can be accompanied by lacrimation, abnormal salivation, nasal discharge and lameness. Approximately 7 days after this the coat looks ruffled at first and then firm painless nodules appear on the skin. They characteristically start appearing around the hindquarters and udders before rapidly spreading around the whole body even finding themselves on the vulva, scrotum, anal region as well as gums of the mouth. The size of the lumps vary from 5 to 50mm in diameter but can coalesce and some of the tissue in between becomes necrotic. This is especially so in very severe and virulent form of the disease. The affected animal develops enlarged lymph nodes and legs can become swollen and sore. The virus can attack the lungs and the rest of the respiratory tract resulting in pneumonia.



## **Effects Of Lumpy Skin Disease**

Affected lactating cows can suffer temporary or permanent loss of milk production and pregnant cows may actually abort as a result of the infection. The lumps can be so numerous as to cover the whole body. This causes sloughing of the skin and this drastically reduces the value of the hide from the affected animal. In bulls a condition known as orchitis which is the swelling of the testicles can occur. This can result in bull infertility. When the nodules attack the udders of lactating animals especially in the case of dairy cows, mastitis easily occurs leading to heavy losses in production. The fact that the nodules can settle for the gums often leads to unwillingness to graze and drink due to the pain. This is the primary reason why affected animals get emaciated in no time. This loss in body condition and weight is an economic loss in beef production. Lumpy skin disease can inflict mortalities of up to 10 percent and this is not a small number given the state of our national herd at the moment and the average herd size per farming family.

## **Vaccination**

The cheapest way to control lumpy skin disease and run away from its negative economic implications is to vaccinate. Vaccinations should be done annually before the onset of the rain season. This is so because lumpy skin disease tends to strike during the summer months when temperatures are high. In Zimbabwe it is recommended that all stock aged 6 months and above be vaccinated against lumpy skin disease in October. All calves that would have been too young when the October vaccinations took place are catered for late in February or early in March.

## **Treatment**

Owing to the fact that lumpy skin disease is caused by virus it therefore has no known cure. However in some cases, one might be told to administer antibiotics, anti-inflammatory drugs or give a shot of vitamins. Let no one confuse this with treatment of the disease because such actions are aimed at addressing secondary bacterial infections or are meant to deal with fever or inflammation and improvement of the animal's appetite.

**Farmers are urged to vaccinate their cattle annually as a way of preventing this disease. Most smallholder farmers tend to wait until there is an outbreak before they consider vaccinating their animals. Whilst vaccination in the face of the disease works quite well, experience shows that it is expensive in more ways than one. For instance when a disease outbreak is announced there is bound to be a surge in demand of the vaccine for that disease as many farmers make frantic efforts to procure the drugs and vaccinate their animals. This obviously pushes the price of the vaccine upwards. In most cases you will be left with no choice but to buy the vaccine at whatever price in a bid to save your herd. In some instances one might discover that the vaccine is not readily available in the locality and such scenario exposes you to very costly options. So vaccinate on time to save both your cattle and money.**

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