Act now to defeat viruses this winter

COVID-19 has focused the world’s attention on viruses and vaccines. As farmers, it should prompt us to review how we manage viruses.
This is only one of the many combinations of vaccination programmes. There are many more, always consult with your vet before embarking on a vaccination programme.

**Handling vaccines**

Vaccines are very delicate and need to be handled with care. They should be:

• Purchased just before use.
• Brought straight home from the vet’s office and refrigerated. They shouldn’t be left in the car or jeep for the day as the heat and light will deactivate them.
• Stored in the fridge door. The fridge should be between 2°C and 8°C. Don’t store in the back of the fridge, where the vaccine may freeze and be deactivated.
• Used as per the manufacturer’s instructions, i.e. if they have to be mixed they should be mixed just before use, etc.
• Used as advised via the proper route of administration – intramuscular (IM), intranasal (IM) or subcutaneously (SC).
• Only used on healthy animals.
• Used-up quickly. Gather enough animals to use all the vaccine in the vial at the same time. The shelf life once opened is very short, e.g. 10 hours.
• Administered using a clean needle.

**Cost**

For the example above, a two-shot vaccine for RSV and PI3, and a one shot IBR vaccine costs ~ €14 per animal (depending on pack size, etc.) For 40 animals that’s €560. If those same animals were infected and forfeited even 0.1kg per head per day over a 150-day winter that is 40 x 0.1 x 150 = 600kg or say €1.80 per kg = €1,080. That is not to mention if you have an outbreak and lose animals, after all the hardship and stress of treating them.

**Word of caution**

Vaccination is not a silver bullet. You must also minimise stress, have DJRRGGRVLQJUHJLPHIRUPEHUVQG worms, have good nutrition and excellent conditions in your sheds. A good shed for cattle is one that is:

• Well-ventilated.
• Draft-free.
• Has enough lying area for each animal housed.
• Has enough feed space for the type of feeding.
• Has access to plenty fresh clean drinking water.
• Has a dry lie.

**TIP**

With so many products available and different combinations of vaccines, a vaccination calendar is extremely useful and can be drawn up with your vet.

If these protocols are not followed, then the vaccine may not work.

So, should you vaccinate on your farm? To take a human analogy, it’s like considering the flu vaccine; you have to assess the disease risk. If you are 22, healthy and mixing with other HDUROGV]

If you are 83, with a heart condition and not in the best of health, it’s better to get the vaccine.

Putting that in the farming context, if you have a closed herd, are not highly stocked, have good nutrition and housing and very little stress in your animals then you will “probably” be OK.

However, you still need to be very vigilant for any signs of respiratory disease. If you buy in cattle, have a high stocking rate with lots of cattle in sheds even with good nutrition and ventilation, you need to consider it. The vaccine is like an insurance policy.

**Check out** www.teagasc.ie and www.animalhealthireland.ie