



University of Idaho
College of Agriculture

Cooperative Extension Service
Agricultural Experiment Station

Current Information Series No. 501

LIBRARY

September 1979

DEC 14 1979

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

Sudden Death in Weaner Calves

Stuart D. Lincoln, DVM

The **Sudden Death Syndrome** is a term commonly used to describe situations in which weaner calves are found dead or are seen dying suddenly. Unfortunately, however, it is an inaccurate and nondiagnostic catch-all designation for any disease that causes unexplained sudden death. Diseases responsible for sudden deaths in weaner calves range from those that are expected to cause sudden death to those that are likely to produce observable illness of several days but which are missed when the calves first become sick. Common diseases that often fall into the **Sudden Death Syndrome** category include:

Diseases that are expected to cause sudden death:

- Blackleg
- Bloat
- Enterotoxemia
- Malignant Edema
- Fatal hemorrhage due to rupture of large blood vessels
- Perforated stomach ulcer

Diseases that are not expected to cause sudden death, but which are missed when weaners become sick:

- Acute pneumonia, especially shipping fever

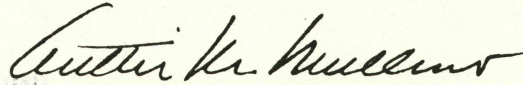
- Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR)
- Feed sickness (acidosis)
- TEM (brainers)
- Calf diphtheria
- Water belly

Probably the most commonly found cause of sudden death is acute pneumonia, particularly the shipping fever complex. Although calves with acute pneumonia seldom die suddenly, they can easily be overlooked when they first become ill. Except for bloat and enterotoxemia, these diseases can be tentatively diagnosed by post-mortem examination of a freshly dead animal. However, if an animal has been dead longer than 6 to 8 hours, the disease changes are often obscured by tissue decomposition.

Whenever a sudden death problem occurs, a post-mortem examination should be done by a veterinarian as quickly as possible before tissue decomposition becomes extreme. In the majority of cases, a tentative diagnosis can be established and appropriate preventive measures can be started. Since many sudden deaths are caused by diseases that are expected to produce illness for several days, the cattle should be observed frequently for the occurrence of additional cases that can be treated.

The Author — Stuart D. Lincoln, DVM, is director of veterinary science clinics and associate professor of veterinary medicine at the University of Idaho Veterinary Medicine Center, Caldwell.

The State is truly our campus. We desire to work for all citizens of the State striving to provide the best possible educational and research information and its application through Cooperative Extension in order to provide a high quality food supply, a strong economy for the State and a quality of life desired by all.



Auttis M. Mullins
Dean, College of Agriculture
University of Idaho



SERVING THE STATE

Teaching . . . Research . . . Service . . . this is the three-fold charge of the College of Agriculture at your state Land-Grant institution, the University of Idaho. To fulfill this charge, the College extends its faculty and resources to all parts of the state.

Service . . . The Cooperative Extension Service has offices in 42 of Idaho's 44 counties under the leadership of men and women specially trained to work with agriculture, home economics and youth. The educational programs of these College of Agriculture faculty members are supported cooperatively by county, state and federal funding.

Research . . . Agricultural Research scientists are located at the campus in Moscow, at Research and Extension Centers near Aberdeen, Caldwell, Parma, Tetonian and Twin Falls and at the U. S. Sheep Experiment Station, Dubois and the USDA/ARS Soil and Water Laboratory at Kimberly. Their work includes research on every major agricultural program in Idaho and on economic activities that apply to the state as a whole.

Teaching . . . Centers of College of Agriculture teaching are the University classrooms and laboratories where agriculture students can earn bachelor of science degrees in any of 20 major fields, or work for master's and Ph.D. degrees in their specialties. And beyond these are the variety of workshops and training sessions developed throughout the state for adults and youth by College of Agriculture faculty.