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## Foot health and digital dermatitis

The incidence of **Digital Dermatitis** is on the rise on many of our units.

The cost of lameness is difficult to measure, but significant as it will have an influence on many aspects of cow health:

- reduced appetite leading to weight loss,
- reduction in yield,
- reduced bulling behaviour and associated reduction in fertility parameters,
- increased recumbency leading to increased mastitis / rise in somatic cell counts.

**Digital Dermatitis** is associated with wet conditions and severity increases during the winter months.

The summer months are the best time to try and reduce infection to a minimum as cows are less crowded and are experiencing dryer conditions.

Effective control is by means of regular foot-baths either in antibiotic solution , copper or formalin solution.

If active infection is present then I would suggest an antibiotic treatment to start with followed by an alternative solution 2 weeks later and repeat the antibiotic foot-bath 2 weeks after that.

This should be followed by regular foot-baths. The solution to be used will be farm-specific, determined by the state of the condition of the feet and the response to the initial treatment.

### Two important points to consider when using foot baths:

1. It is essential that the feet are clean prior to using any foot-bath solution especially the antibiotic preparation.
2. It is important to run the in-calf heifers through the foot bath as well. On some farm where **Digital Dermatitis** is a problem up to 50% of heifers had early signs. This will not only affect the performance of these heifers as they join the herd but may also act as a fresh source of infection to cows as they come into the buildings again during the winter months.

Please contact the surgery to discuss treatment and control of this problem.