

January 2023

## Health risks for cattle exposed to flooding

The latest atmospheric rivers that brought abundant, much needed precipitation to California have left many areas flooded or at least muddy or soggy. Cattle can face several health risks when exposed to flood water or muddy conditions. Some of the risks include:

**Water-borne pathogens and toxins:** Flood water can contain pathogens and bacteria that can make cattle sick, such as *Leptospira* or *Salmonella*. Ensuring a fresh water supply is important because even though there may be plenty of water present on the premises, it is likely contaminated with pathogens or toxins and should not serve as a water source for cattle. Keeping up with Lepto vaccinations may be particularly important this year.

As a rule of thumb, water requirements are:

- Lactating cows and bulls: 20 – 25 gallons/head/day
- Young growing cattle under 500 lbs: 5 – 10 gallons/head/day.

**Other hazards caused by wind:** Fences can be damaged during a storm event and flooded areas can also contain debris, sharp objects, and other hazards that can cause physical injuries to cattle. Pay attention to chemical storage buildings where storm damage may allow cattle access to chemicals such as fertilizers, pesticides, or lead containing batteries.

**Parasites:** Parasites such as liver flukes or other intestinal parasites thrive in wet conditions. For liver flukes to become a problem, certain types of snails shown below need to be present to complete the fluke life cycle. Internal parasite control may be particularly important following this wet period.



*Galba trunculata*  
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**Footrot:** Muddy pastures predispose to footrot. Watch out for lameness, inspect lame cattle for typical lesions between toes and treat promptly.

**Stress:** Displacement, changes to their environment and diet, can also lead to stress and affect the immune system and overall health of the animals. Respiratory disease may be more common after stressful events. Avoiding further stresses such as gathering and processing, until conditions have improved may alleviate some of the adverse consequences of stress suffered during heavy winter storms.

Close monitoring of cattle for signs of disease, keeping up with vaccinations and parasite control, and low stress cattle handling are always important, but are crucial after events such as the latest winter storms.

As always, consult your veterinarian for treatment or herd health management options.

