

Scoring hair loss and lesions

Score	No hair loss or lesion	Head and neck	Front leg	Hind leg and hock	Rest of body
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lesions or hairless patches smaller than 2cm in diameter or no hair loss or lesions 				
Score	Hairless patch				
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One or more hairless patches larger than 2cm in diameter Scars should only be included if they are at least 3mm wide 				
Score	Lesion				
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One or more lesions (areas of skin damage, wound or scab) larger than 2cm in diameter Scratches or cuts should only be included if they are at least 3mm wide 				
Factors which can result in hair loss and/or lesions		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorrect neck barrier height – cubicles and feed rail Protruding items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cubicle comfort Amount and type of bedding Protruding items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cubicle comfort Amount and type of bedding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broken cubicle fittings Protruding/low hanging items in housing or cow flow area

Why score hair loss and lesions?

Hair loss and lesions demonstrate some form of damage to the skin and, in some cases, the underlying tissues. Scratches, cuts or scars should only be included if they are at least 3mm wide. Occasional small areas of skin damage may be inevitable among a herd of cattle but areas larger than 2cm may give reason for concern. Hairless patches indicate rubbing on rough surfaces or irritation, ectoparasite presence or previous injuries (scars).

The location of both hair loss and lesions is important in determining the likely causes. For example, legs, knees and hocks with hair loss or lesions are indicative that the lying area is not comfortable, with abrasive surfaces, insufficient bedding and/or hard surfaces. Hair loss or lesions to the neck tend to indicate an inadequate feed barrier or incorrect cubicle neck rail height.

How to score your herd

1. Scoring the entire herd is best practice. However, the table below gives guidance on the minimum number of cows you should score to get an accurate picture of your herd. For example, if you have a herd size of 125 cows, you need to score 65 cows.

Herd size	Minimum sample size
Up to 50	30 (or all cows if < 30 in herd)
50–100	50
10–200	65
201+	73

2. Visually assess the entire cow according to the following areas:
 - Head and neck
 - Front leg
 - Hind leg and hock
 - Rest of body
3. Choose a time and place that will allow you to observe cows, for example, legs and hocks can easily be observed in the milking parlour. Alternatively, observe cows when doing routine management procedures such as hoof trimming, AI, PD checks, routine vaccinations, etc.
4. Tally the scores for each body part.

Using the information

- Investigate the causes of hair loss and lesions (scores 1 and 2) in the cow's environment
- Manage necessary changes to assist with reducing the number of hair loss patches
- Regularly score the herd and monitor the scores to determine if the changes have had the desired effect

Key benefits of scoring

- Use as a troubleshooting tool to find areas of discomfort in the cow's environment
- Motivates farm staff to improve the cow's comfort in its environment and, therefore, overall herd health and performance
- Use to meet the recommendations or requirements of assurance schemes
- Suggests areas of the cow's environment which may require attention to reduce risk of injury

Further information

Information and a short film to help understand the score system can be viewed on the AHDB Dairy website at dairy.ahdb.org.uk

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