



## Lumps, Bumps, or Bruises?

In the past I had a request to discuss “Lumpy Jaw” and I thought I would mention it in the context of other similar ailments involving lumps, bumps, or bruises. Classic “Lumpy Jaw” is the common name for Actinomycosis, which is an infected lump usually on the lower jaw (but sometimes on the upper jaw) of cattle. It is a bony, hard, immovable lump caused by bacterial infection (*Actinomyces bovis*) within the mandible. The bacteria itself is actually a normal inhabitant of the bovine mouth, but it takes an oral abrasion or puncture to introduce it to the bone. Hard plant awns, thorns, stickers, or dry, coarse, stemmy feeds are usually the culprit. If caught early enough, it is usually easily treated with intravenous Sodium Iodide and/or Penicillin. Caution should be used in treating cows in later gestation with Sodium Iodide as there have been reports of abortion in the past. If a lump jaw is allowed to fester it can be irreversible and detrimental to the animal, as it may affect their ability to eat. The treatment is the same but more aggressive for more severe cases. Once the bone has become infected and visibly enlarged, it is usually possible to stop the lump from becoming larger, but not to get rid of it all together.

Other things that can be confused with classic lumpy jaw are: jaw abscesses or hematomas, “wooden tongue”, or “bottle jaw”. So, how do we determine the difference? To begin with, feel the lump to see if it moves freely from the jaw, and if it is hard and bony. Abscesses can be very hard, but they will not be tightly incorporated to the jaw bone. One way to quickly rule-out an abscess is to take a new, clean needle and poke the lump after you have restrained their head properly. If you get pus, it’s an abscess; if you get blood, it could be a hematoma or lump jaw (try a longer needle); if you get a clear serum-like fluid it is likely a hematoma. Pus you can drain with a scalpel (1-2” hole), but don’t cut it if you get blood or serum. Hematomas or bruises should be treated with antibiotics (Penicillin) to help prevent an abscess from forming or turning into a lump jaw. In severe cases of lump jaw, there may be draining tracts called fistulas that drain pus from the bone itself. In these cases flushing the wound with gentle iodine for several days along with IV treatment will help stop the infection. “Wooden Tongue” is an infection by a different bacteria common to the bovine oral cavity. It affects the tongue muscle and as its name indicates, it makes the tongue rigid like a board, which prevents normal grazing or eating behavior. Wooden tongue is also treated with intravenous Sodium Iodide and is usually reversible. Sometimes wooden tongue will be visible as a swelling under the jaw where the tongue muscle is, however “bottle jaw” presents the same way. “Bottle Jaw” is the term used for the edema that builds up under the jaw for various conditions. Johnes disease, Hardware/Heart Disease, or a heavy load of worms can cause bottle jaw. Bottle Jaw, itself, will not impair their ability to eat like wooden tongue will, but the underlying causes may.

In summary, lumps, bumps, or bruises on the jaw shouldn’t be ignored, and hopefully this small article will help shed some light on that mysterious lump that shows up. Remember that the simple needle test should be able to point you in the right direction for treatment, and whether or not you need to call the vet. Also, be on the alert for any possible causes of oral irritants in your feed or feed bunks.