

Annabelle Martin BBC News, Gloucestershire 4 September 2025

A vets' practice has warned farmers of the risk of hemlock poisoning after seven cattle have been found dead in one field.

Tyndale vets, in Dursley, said they have seen an increase in fatal cases in Wales and the south-west of England.

They said drought conditions are likely to have made things worse because the water level in ditches is lower, making it easier for the cattle to accidentally access.

Izzi Gilmour, one of the farm vets at Tyndale, said: "Sadly, there is no cure once it is ingested. If you think your livestock has had a case of sudden death, do get a vet to investigate."

SOURCE, TYNDALE FARM VETERINARY PRACTICE



Oenanthe crocata known as **hemlock water dropwort** is extremely poisonous.

Ms Gilmour said they have had two separate cases from two different farms, which have both had animals suffer from poisoning.

"Cows are curious creatures and are accidentally eating this plant," she said.

She added that the early symptoms to look out for are "quick breathing, teeth grinding and then muscle weakness which progresses to seizures and collapsing before fatality".

According to The Royal Horticultural Society, hemlock water dropwort is an "extremely poisonous, perennial plant" and advises wearing gloves and other protective equipment when handling.

It is commonly known as deadman's fingers due to its appearance.



Hemlock Poisoning

You may have seen on our social media that we have had several cases of Hemlock Water Dropwort poisoning recently. This has likely been worsened due to the drought meaning the water level in ditches was lower, so cattle have been going deeper into ditches/digging for water. It can also occur after ditch dredging and removal of the plants that livestock can consume.

Early clinical signs include rapid breathing, teeth grinding and muscle weakness before progressing to seizures and paralysis. Death follows shortly after. There is no treatment. It can affect both cattle and sheep.

The plant has these characteristic tuber roots and the flower itself can look similar to Cow Parsley, though the stem is firmer and woody. Please be vigilant and check any ditches for hemlock prior to putting livestock in the field. Wear gloves if removing hemlock. It is also still toxic if bailed into hay.

Just to add the animals in this first image had access to nearby plentiful fresh water and supplemented forage. It was awful, as you can well understand.