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How can I reduce the risk of bovine TB to my cattle?

Information update and facts
relating to Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB)



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How can I reduce the risk of bovine TB to my cattle?

Bovine TB (bTB) is an infectious disease. You have the power to reduce the risk of bTB spreading to your cattle.

Infected cattle can appear healthy but they may already be spreading infection. It is essential that any infected cattle are identified and removed before they can spread disease further.

Preventing the introduction of bTB into your herd is crucial. This advice applies to every herd in the country.

The decisions you make affect the risk to your cattle of bTB. You can take steps to protect your herd from disease, and protect your family and yourself from the stress and financial difficulties of a bTB breakdown.





1. bTB testing

- i) High quality bTB testing reduces the threat to your herd. If an infected animal is present, it is better to have it identified and removed promptly. The longer infection is present, the more likely it is to spread to other cattle. This can make the difference between having a small breakdown or a large scale, on-going, bTB problem.
- ii) Ensure good quality bTB testing facilities are available, especially a crush of appropriate size. Sufficient light and shelter are important.
- iii) Provide the vet with any assistance required in order to do the job well.
- iv) Each animal must be identified and have its skin thickness measured and recorded on both days in order for the test to be effective and protect your herd from undetected spread of disease.

2. Reduce the risk of infection being left behind

- i) Cull any cattle which ever tested inconclusive, even if they subsequently re-tested negative.
- ii) Consider culling any cattle which were in the herd during a previous bTB breakdown, particularly older cows and those that were part of previously infected groups.





3. Reduce the risk of introducing cattle which are infected

- i) Source cattle from herds which have not had a bTB breakdown in recent years.
- ii) Buy cattle with a recent bTB test date as they are less likely to be infected.
- iii) Isolate purchased animals and carry out a post-movement bTB test to protect the rest of your herd.
- iv) Maintain a closed herd if possible.

4. Reduce the risk from badgers

- i) If badger setts or latrines are present on grazing land, you should fence them off with electric fencing.
- ii) Do not feed cattle concentrates spread on the ground.
- iii) Feed cattle in raised troughs. Avoid spilling feed on the ground, as badgers may consume it and contaminate any leftovers.
- iv) Use raised drinking troughs
- v) Badger-proof farm buildings by covering the lower part of access gates to sheds so they can't get through.

5. Reduce the risk of neighbourhood spread

- i) Ensure boundary fences are well maintained.
- ii) Stop nose to nose contact with cattle from another herd.
- iii) Avoid mixing groups of cattle which are normally managed on separate land fragments.



6. Reduce your risk through biosecurity

Biosecurity is critical to protecting your cattle from a range of infectious diseases; if you take steps to improve biosecurity on your farm, you will reduce the risk of bTB and also of many other diseases.

- i) Ask yourself how can bTB be brought onto my farm? Through people, equipment or poor fencing? What steps have you taken to reduce this risk?
- ii) Clean and disinfect shared machinery after each use. Effective cleaning and disinfecting of any areas where bTB infected cattle were kept is essential and will reduce the risk of infecting other cattle. The bTB bacteria can survive in the environment for weeks and even months.

7. Breeding to reduce the risk of bTB

When selecting bulls for breeding, choose ones that are genetically more resistant to bTB. The Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) now provide a score of genetic resistance to bTB for bulls; farmers can use this to reduce the risk of bTB through selecting the right bull and increasing the level of genetic resistance in the herd.



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Further information is available at

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/diseasecontrol/bovinetb/>