

Johnes Disease: are your cattle at risk?

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ARE any of your cows thin, scouring or losing condition? These are the signs of Johnes disease. It is a chronic wasting disease caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis*.

Cows are most commonly infected as calves and harbour the disease for a long time before showing signs (often between two

to six years old).

However in this time they can shed Johnes and infect others at any point, but particularly at calving.

It is a difficult disease both to test for and eradicate from a herd. One cow showing signs of disease is often the tip of the iceberg, with others infected but not showing symptoms.

The blood test is not very sensitive as a one off test, as animals can test negative in the

early stages of the disease. This means to really make an effort at eradicating the disease requires a combination of annual blood testing and culling out positive cows before they show disease, as well as trying to reduce the spread of disease as discussed below.

The advantage of testing cows means that positive cows can be culled before they are excreting large numbers of bacteria.

The disease is most commonly spread in faeces. Thus control should involve keeping calving pens and housed cattle as clean and dry as possible. Separate calf creep areas allow calves to lie in a clean area.

Another route of infection is infected colostrum thus it is important not to pool colostrum. Frozen colostrum should be stored individually and from a Johnes-free cow.

Bought-in cattle, particularly bulls, are another major route of infection into a herd. Thus good biosecurity is important for the control of Johnes's as well as for all infectious diseases.

Contact your local vet for further information.



TRICKY DETECTION: the disease can be difficult to spot – this healthy-looking Holstein cow is a victim