

# BRUCELLOSIS

In terms of Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act no 35 of 1984), which provides for the control of animal diseases and parasites, for measures to promote animal health and for matters connected therewith, the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries encourages you to prevent and control the disease "Brucellosis".

Brucellosis is a very contagious disease of animals and humans that is caused by bacteria (germs). Infected animals become carriers of the disease for the rest of their lives and can spread the infection to other animals and people. There is no cure for infected animals but people can be treated.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF BRUCELLOSIS IN CATTLE?

Cows recently infected with brucellosis may lose their unborn calves (abort) at about 7 months of pregnancy. If calves are born, they are very weak and may die shortly after birth. A severe drop in milk production might be seen in an infected herd. Cows may also develop large swellings on their knees (hygromas) as a result of brucellosis and bulls with brucellosis may become sterile.

Cows that have been infected with Brucellosis for a long time may not abort their calves or show any other signs, but can still spread the infection to other animals and people. This is why it is important to have your cattle tested for Brucellosis.

## HOW CATTLE BECOME INFECTED?

Bacteria (germs) are found in the aborted foetus (unborn calf), the afterbirth around the foetus and the fluid from the womb of the infected cow. These materials can contaminate grazing areas, water or anything else they come into contact with such as wheelbarrows, feeding troughs etc. with the bacteria that cause Brucellosis. Other animals may drag the afterbirth or aborted calf around and into other areas and spread the infection. Cattle are curious by nature and tend to sniff and lick aborted material and afterbirth. The bacteria can then enter through the mouth, nose, eyes and broken skin of cattle. If grazing is contaminated they can get the bacteria from eating the grass.

## IT AFFECTS PEOPLE TOO!

Symptoms in humans are often vague and may resemble many other diseases such as flu, but can be very serious.

## HOW DO PEOPLE GET BRUCELLOSIS?

- People get brucellosis by drinking unpasteurised milk (raw milk) from infected cows.
- People get brucellosis from handling the afterbirth, the aborted calf or trying to help pull a calf from an infected cow. Protective clothing (gloves, goggles, masks etc.) should therefore be worn when handling this material.
- People who accidentally prick themselves with the needle while vaccinating cattle with brucellosis vaccines (S19 or RB51) can get the disease.
- One can also get brucellosis when slaughtering and infected animal without protective clothing.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF BRUCELLOSIS?

A person usually becomes ill 1 to 2 weeks after contact with the bacteria.

At first you may think you have flu.



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### The signs are:

Pains in the muscles and joints, Weakness, tiredness, Fever, Persistent coughing and cold sweat, especially at night, Nausea, Headache, Complications may develop if the disease is not diagnosed and treated early

## HOW CAN BRUCELLOSIS BE PREVENTED IN PEOPLE?

Drink only pasteurised (boiled) milk. Pasteurised milk has been heated in a special way to kill all the harmful bacteria.

Always wear protective clothing when handling material which may be infected and when slaughtering an infected cow.

## HOW CAN BRUCELLOSIS BE PREVENTED IN CATTLE?

Brucellosis in cattle may be prevented through vaccination and biosecurity. Biosecurity means keeping your cattle safe by keeping them in a fenced area and by preventing the disease from entering you herd.

## VACCINATION

Vaccinations are available to help protect cattle against the effects of brucellosis.

- Vaccinate all female calves between the age of 4 and 8 months old with a registered vaccine and keep a record of the ones that have been vaccinated.
- Do not vaccinate the bull (he may become infertile)
- Do not vaccinate older females as they may test positive if the wrong vaccine is used (and if they are pregnant they may abort). Ask a veterinarian if you want to vaccinate older animals.
- The vaccine should always be kept cold or it will not be effective. Follow the instructions for use and be careful not to let any humans smoke, eat, drink or wipe their eyes while working with the vaccine. Be careful not to prick yourself with the needle.

## BIOSECURITY

Biosecurity is very important to protect your cattle from getting the infection from other infected animals.

- Never buy or introduce cattle or other animals (e.g. goats, sheep) that are infected with brucellosis into your herd.
- Only buy animals that have a full brucellosis negative testing history and are from a proven brucellosis negative herd. Ask a veterinarian if you are unsure.
- Do let your cattle sniff or lick the afterbirth and the calves of cows (sheep and goats) that have recently given birth. Remove and burn afterbirth and aborted calves immediately.
- Remember that other small animals like jackals or dogs may drag afterbirth and aborted calves from one place to another. This can spread infection.
- Keep your cattle away from grazing areas, water sources and any objects that may be contaminated with brucellosis from afterbirth and aborted calves.
- Fence off your cattle so they do not come into contact with other infected cattle.

**For further information contact your nearest animal health technician or state/private veterinarian**

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