



Brucella ovis (ovine epididymitis)

Background

Ovine epididymitis, caused by *Brucella ovis*, is an infectious disease which primarily affects sheep. *Brucella ovis* produces a clinical or subclinical disease that is characterized by genital lesions in rams and placentitis in ewes. Accordingly, the main consequences of the disease are reduced fertility in rams, infrequent abortions in ewes, and increased perinatal mortality. Humans are not affected by *Brucella ovis*. Ovine epididymitis is a WOA (formerly the OIE) listed disease. As a form of brucellosis in ruminants, it is notifiable in Ireland.

Legislative basis

In Ireland, testing for *B. ovis* is carried out in accordance with Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/688 chapter 2, article 15 part 4 (a) (b). This specifies that prior to export, uncastrated males intended for breeding must:

- come from a holding where no case of contagious epididymitis (*B. ovis*) has been diagnosed in the preceding 12 months,
- have been continuously kept on that holding for 30 days prior to dispatch,
- in the 30 days prior to dispatch have undergone, with negative results, a serological test.

Active surveillance

Animals are sampled on the farm of origin prior to export by official veterinarians from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). Testing is carried out in the specialised blood testing laboratory operated by DAFM in Cork. Results of testing for recent years are as follows:

Year	Ovine samples tested for <i>B. ovis</i>	Positives	Negatives
2018	231	0	231
2019	316	0	316
2020	400	0	400
2021	469	0	469
2022	574	0	574
2023	618	0	618



Passive surveillance

It should be noted that the active surveillance outlined above is supplementary to the passive surveillance which Ireland regards as its mainstay in detecting incursions of exotic disease.

Brucellosis is a notifiable disease in Ireland, meaning that anyone who suspects that a sheep or goat may have the disease is legally obliged to notify DAFM.

Beyond disease reporting, DAFM operates a network of regional veterinary laboratories, strategically located around the country. Farmers and private veterinary practitioners (PVPs) submit large numbers of samples, including aborted foetuses, to the laboratories every week, and therefore DAFM can be confident that in the event that disease reporting was not effective in detecting an incursion of brucellosis, then laboratory-based passive surveillance would achieve this result instead.

Farmers are encouraged to have their PVP examine and test sheep and goats which have aborted, to report suspicions of brucellosis in either species to their local Regional Veterinary Office, and to make use of their local Regional Veterinary Laboratory to aid with diagnosis of disease conditions.