



Bovine Tuberculosis

Background

Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) is a chronic, infectious disease of cattle caused by *Mycobacterium bovis*. It is OIE listed, and notifiable in Ireland. The bacterium can cause disease in other domestic or wild animals and also in humans. If left unchecked, it has the potential to cause substantial economic losses at farm level, as well as being of importance for trade reasons. The Irish TB Eradication Programme is highly integrated and addresses the risks relating to TB in Ireland, as informed by a comprehensive, long-standing engagement with risk-focused research. As a result the prevalence of the disease at both herd and animal level in Ireland is low, clinical cases are extremely rare, and there has been a downward trend in the number of positive test results in the past decade. The programme is implemented by DAFM with industry stakeholder engagement/involvement in programme strategic goals. The Irish TB programme is approved annually and is part-funded by the European Commission.

Further information on all aspects of the Irish TB eradication programme is available at

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

Legislative basis

TB surveillance or TB testing is governed by Statutory Instrument 58 of 2015, which is derived from the Animal Health and Welfare Act of 2013. TB surveillance is also governed by Council Directive 64/432/EEC of 26 June 1964.

Active surveillance programme

Annual herd testing

All herds of bovine animals in Ireland have at least one herd test per year. All bovine animals present on the farm on the day of the herd test are tested, with the exception of calves aged under 6 weeks on that date. The test used is the single intradermal comparative tuberculin test (SICTT). Animals showing a positive reaction to the test are known as reactors. In the event that one or more reactors are disclosed on the herd test, the herd is restricted and the reactors are slaughtered. Following restriction, herds must typically have two clear herd tests, with intervals of sixty days between these tests, before they can sell cattle. These tests are known as “reactor retests”. Many other consequential tests are also carried out as part of a



comprehensive risk-based approach. As a follow up measure, gamma interferon blood testing is carried out in herds where it is deemed appropriate for the investigation of the outbreak.

Slaughter plant surveillance

All bovine animals slaughtered in Ireland generally have the head and thoracic lymph nodes examined for TB. In the event that TB is detected, samples are taken to allow confirmatory testing to take place, and the herd of submission and/or epidemiologically linked herds are restricted from trading.

Other surveillance

Other surveillance carried out in relation to TB in bovines in Ireland includes enhanced neighbourhood, trace and area based herd testing performed on a risk basis after veterinary epidemiological evaluation of breakdown herds. TB in other farmed species in Ireland is rare but is occasionally identified. Milking goats are subject to a TB control programme including SICCT testing. Badgers, as a reservoir host of M. Bovis, play an important role in bovine TB maintenance in Ireland. They are culled or vaccinated depending on their epidemiological role in different areas in the country. Prevalence in badgers and incidence in wild deer populations is monitored on an ongoing basis.

TB testing statistics 1st January 2019 to 31st of December 2019

Herds Tested	Herds Restricted	Herd Incidence	Herds Restricted at year end	Animals in country at year end	Tests on Animals	Reactors	Reactors per 1000 Tests A.P.T.
109,175	4,060	3.72%	2,273	6,363,409	8,827,682	17,058	1.62

More detailed statistics and some data for the current year may be found at:

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

and also at:

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

Passive surveillance

The active surveillance programme outlined above is Ireland's mainstay in detecting bovine tuberculosis. Because of this programme, clinical tuberculosis in bovines is rarely seen. Nonetheless, tuberculosis is covered by Ireland's passive surveillance system, and offers a valuable additional means of detection of the disease, especially in non-bovine species.



Bovine tuberculosis is a notifiable disease in Ireland, meaning that anyone who suspects that an animal may have the disease is legally obliged to notify DAFM (under SI 130 of 2016).

DAFM also operates a network of regional veterinary laboratories, strategically located around the country. Farmers, private veterinary practitioners (PVPs) and others submit large numbers of samples, including carcasses, to the laboratories every week, and TB is occasionally detected in these submissions.

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