



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 and clinical cases are extremely rare. However, the incidence of bTB has been trending upwards in recent years and the programme is adapting to address the emerging risks relating to bTB in Ireland. The eradication programme is implemented by DAFM in consultation with industry stakeholder engagement/involvement through the TB Forum. In January 2021 Minister McConalogue launched the [Bovine TB Eradication Strategy 2021 – 2030](#). 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 www.bovinetb.ie.

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. From April 2021, TB control in Ireland will be governed by Regulation (EU) 2016/429 on transmissible animal diseases (the 'Animal Health Law').

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 which were born on the farm. 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 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 *Mycobacterium 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.

More detailed statistics on bovine TB may be found at: www.bovinetb.ie

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.