

Theileria and anaemia in cattle

Fact Sheet #2: Understanding the risk of Theileria infection

October 2013

Theileria orientalis (Ikeda) is a microscopic blood-borne parasite that can cause anaemia in cattle and, in more severe cases, lead to death. Theileria is transmitted primarily by the cattle tick, only infect cattle, and is not a risk to human health, or a food safety issue.

Five key factors for assessing the risk of Theileria infection in your herd

1. Is Theileria in your area?

Northland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, King Country, Taranaki, Whanganui and Wairarapa (and one case in Rangiora) are all regions with confirmed cases. However, Theileria could be more widespread as signs can be missed or not show up in affected cattle.

2. Are there ticks present?

All cattle in areas where ticks are present are considered at risk of being infected, particularly the North Island. However, having ticks does not necessarily mean your herd is infected. Ticks are small and difficult to see, and very few are needed to transmit Theileria. The disease can also be spread by tick larvae, nymphs or adults on other animals such as birds, rabbits and deer.

3. Has there been cattle movement on-off your farm?

Have cattle from Theileria-infected areas been introduced to your farm, or brought back from off-farm grazing, or new cattle or service bulls brought in from infected areas? Cattle that may not have been exposed to Theileria being moved to a place where Theileria are present also increases your risk.

4. Are young stock at risk of infection?

Young calves up to about six or seven months of age are susceptible. Their immune systems are still developing and they are also coping with changes such as weaning and being transported to other farms.

5. Are cattle undergoing changes like calving or are they sick?

Cattle in late pregnancy, calving and early lactation, calves being weaned and potentially service bulls when they begin mating, are more at risk. Sick and poor condition cattle are also more susceptible to infection.

How can I lessen the severity of the infection?

- Talk to your veterinarian about the risks of Theileria infection in your herd, in your area and about preventive measures.
- Monitor the health and condition of your animals, and if you have any concerns seek the advice of your veterinarian.
- Inspect cattle for the presence of ticks. Tick treatments can be useful to reduce the tick load and the severity of the disease. Use according to label instructions or on advice of your veterinarian.
- When buying in new stock, determine their health status – ask for records of veterinary and other treatments.
- Quarantine new stock including service bulls, from the rest of the herd for at least seven days. Inspect the cattle for ticks during this time and treat for ticks as necessary.
- Cattle (young and mature) in good condition and on good feed will be less susceptible to infection. Careful attention to nutrition, worm control, overall health management and trace element supplementation (if required) will minimise your risk of disease.
- Minimise stress on stock at times when risk of disease is high, e.g. weaning calves, cows in late pregnancy, early lactation and potentially at mating.

See *Detection and Treatment (Fact Sheet #3)* for more information.

Further advice is available

- From your veterinarian
- dairynz.co.nz/theileria for all fact sheets
- 0800 4 DairyNZ (0800 4 324 7969)