

# Mycoplasma bovis in Australia

The New Zealand Government announced in May 2018 that an attempt will be made to eradicate *Mycoplasma bovis* from New Zealand.

Since this announcement, some farmers in Australia have been interested to learn about how *Mycoplasma bovis* is managed in this country.

Australia has been tracking *Mycoplasma bovis* since 2006, but it was first isolated from milk from Australian dairy cows in 1970. *Mycoplasma bovis* is found world-wide, including the US, UK, Ireland and most European countries. It is not a notifiable disease in Australia, and there are no trade restrictions for any of our markets. *Mycoplasma bovis* does not have any effects on meat or milk for human consumption.

A three year research project with the University of Sydney was commissioned by Dairy Australia in 2013 to find out more about the disease in Australia, which looked into the strain present in Australia, the modes of transmission and laboratory testing procedures.

The research found that there is only one strain of *Mycoplasma bovis* in Australia, which means it is likely that it was only introduced once into Australia before 2006 and not again since.

*Mycoplasma bovis* is found in all dairy areas of Australia, though only small numbers of farms have been affected. For affected herds, the disease caused by *Mycoplasma bovis* can have a significant financial impact on a business due to lost production, culling and the death of cows and calves.

The infection can be difficult to detect as heifers and cows may carry *Mycoplasma bovis* without showing any signs of infection. These carrier animals are an important source of infection whether they are introduced or home bred cows. *Mycoplasma bovis* infections also appear with a range of different symptoms on different farms, including calf pneumonia, head tilt, conjunctivitis, ill thrift, joint swellings, mastitis and even sudden deaths. Once the infection is established in a herd it is difficult to eradicate, as there is no effective vaccination or treatment, so farm biosecurity measures are vital to keep *Mycoplasma bovis* infections out.

## How do I keep it out?

Biosecurity is the best defence against *Mycoplasma bovis*.

Possible sources of infection for a herd include:

- › Introduced livestock (cows, calves and bulls)
- › Equipment (particularly equipment that contacts the mucosal surfaces of stock e.g. AI guns)
- › People (service providers, AI technicians, veterinarians)
- › Biologics (semen, embryos)

*Mycoplasma bovis* does not live well in the environment, and most transmissions occur animal to animal. This means the most common source of a new infection on farm is from introduced livestock. Heat and dryness are the enemies of *Mycoplasma bovis*, so sterilisation and pasteurisation are also good control measures. The risk of spread from semen and embryos is generally considered low.

Service providers and their equipment could be a risk of carrying *Mycoplasma bovis* from farm to farm, depending on their contact with infected farms and how well they follow sound biosecurity practices. It is reasonable and a good idea for farmers to discuss their biosecurity protocols with service providers to manage this risk.



## Want to know more?

Dairy Australia has produced a number of documents to help farmers and their advisers on preventing, identifying and managing *Mycoplasma bovis* in Australian conditions, which are all available on the Dairy Australia website [www.dairyaustralia.com.au](http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au)

These include:

- Webinar – *Mycoplasma* biosecurity awareness and what dairy farmers need to know - 2015
- Factsheet – *Mycoplasma* in dairy herds – 2016
- FAQ – *Mycoplasma* prevention in dairy herds – 2017
- Factsheet – Using PCR testing in milk quality investigations - 2018

If you are concerned about the risk of *Mycoplasma bovis* in your herd, your vet or Countdown adviser will be able to help guide you through the testing process.

Countdown advisers are milk quality professionals, including field services staff, veterinarians and milking machine technicians trained to help farmers with milk quality investigations. The list of Countdown advisers can be found at [www.dairyaustralia.com.au/Countdown](http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au/Countdown)