

Keeping new disease away from your farm

With the increasing influence of health status on herd profitability, unknowingly introducing a disease to a farm is a potentially costly event. It is often easier to keep diseases not normally seen on a farm from being introduced, than dealing with vaccination programs and treating sick animals after a disease takes hold.

A more technical term for avoiding disease introduction is *biosecurity*, which is a set of practices to help minimize the introduction or spread of disease.

At 1,200 pounds, cattle look tough but they can be “taken down” by a few unseen bacteria, viruses or parasites. Adverse effects include decreased pregnancy rates, abortion, weak calves, reduced weight gain, increased sickness or death. Some diseases can be the focus of trade negotiations including “reportable” diseases which must be reported to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

With more people traveling around the world, and many operations providing farm tours to urban visitors, a few simple procedures will help to avoid introduction of disease.

How it can happen

Disease can be transferred through manure, aerosol or nose contact, pets, wildlife, or through a variety of cattle body fluids (i.e. semen, urine, colostrum). It can also be introduced by humans through touch or nasal fluids, footwear, sewage, imported meat, transport vehicles (manure haulers, front-end loaders) and feed. Sharing equipment and partially used feed bags may also be a way to unknowingly share disease between farms.



Low-risk visitors include urban persons who have no contact with livestock in your region. Medium-risk visitors include those who routinely visit farms but have little or no contact with animals, perhaps salesmen and delivery people. High-risk visitors include veterinarians, livestock haulers, livestock-owning neighbors, and anyone else who has close contact with animals and their bodily discharges. Wildlife can also transfer disease including rabies, leptospirosis or salmonellosis. This includes deer, birds, coyotes, wild dogs, rats and mice.

What can be done

Biosecurity practices don't have to be cumbersome, confusing or expensive. A small tub, a gallon of bleach or disinfectant, and a brush will go a long way toward protecting your farm from “outside” disease.

- Clean and disinfect footwear that has been to other farms or auction marts, or sites where cattle manure is present.
- Use disinfectants such as Virkon or Peroxigard, or mix three parts bleach to two parts water in a tub. Remove obvious mud and manure first, then scrub boots especially the bottom tread with a long-handled brush.
- If handling other people's livestock, wash your hands thoroughly before handling cattle on your operation. Change soiled clothing before handling your own cattle.

What can be done continued...

- Become familiar with the health status of incoming replacement cattle, what they have been vaccinated for and any disease outbreaks that may have occurred in the past year.
- If hauling livestock to/from common cattle areas, consider a quick spray wash or going through a car wash, after removing obvious debris at a site without direct cattle contact.
- Use only commercially-available milk replacers and colostrum. Do not bring in raw colostrum from other dairy or beef herds.
- Wash and disinfect equipment, feed buckets, shovels and other tools used at the local fair or by your neighbour. Do this before borrowing or returning them!
- Do not bring home meat scraps to feed pets or poultry as they can contain viruses and bacteria.



Bleach is an active disinfectant for a maximum of 20 minutes when mixed with water.

- Keep vehicles hauling livestock or feed from driving through areas where cattle are regularly kept, if possible.
- If you have traveled internationally, wash your clothes, shower and disinfect all footwear before contact with cattle. Better yet, avoid getting near your animals for 72 hours (three days) after traveling internationally, to ensure you do not pass on any viruses living in your nasal passages. Use a disinfectant to wipe dirt and grime from personal items such as luggage and cameras.
- Ask all guests going further than your house if they have traveled outside the country or have been in direct contact with other livestock in the past three days.
- Company coming to look at cattle? Ask them to clean their boots.
- Entertaining prospective international buyers? Consider providing them with rubber boots that are never removed from your premise.

Use common sense and be prepared - have disinfectant tools available. The commitment and education of everyone helps us all protect the health status of each cattle herd.



Keep inexpensive disinfectant supplies on hand so you are prepared.