



Livestock Notifiable Disease

Factsheets

Enzootic Bovine Leukosis (EBL)

If you suspect signs of any notifiable disease, you must immediately notify a Defra Divisional Veterinary Manager.

Definition

EBL is a transmissible disease caused by a virus. It can be transmitted both vertically, mother to calf, and horizontally, cow to cow; causing leukaemia and multiple tumours. It is an Office International des Epizooties (OIE) List "B" disease. The first confirmed case in GB cattle was in 1978 and the last was in 1996. A notifiable disease it has been eradicated in Great Britain, and Great Britain was granted EBL-free status by the EU Commission in July 1999.

Species affected

Cattle only. The disease is not transmissible to humans.

Symptoms

Clinical signs are usually apparent in cattle between 4 and 8 years of age and are only rarely seen in animals under 2 years old. In the live animal the disease is characterised by chronic ill health, progressive loss of condition, weakness, anaemia and anorexia, attributable to tumorous infiltration of various organs throughout the body. Tumour formation in the abomasum, intestines, liver and abdominal lymph nodes is common with consequential digestive upset. Cutaneous lesions may occur; but these tend to be relatively localised and unilateral. Concurrently with the development of tumours there is a detectable serological antibody response. Lymphocytosis, however, is not a constant feature of the disease although when it does occur it is presumptive evidence of infection. Serological evidence of EBL is more specific; it may be demonstrated within a few months of the infection being contracted (e.g. in calves at four months of age) and in some cases many years before clinical signs of the disease are obvious. Clinically affected animals will lose condition and eventually die.

Post Mortem

The findings of any tumorous changes, other than papillomas (warts) or haemangiomas, in a bovine carcass must be considered suspicious of EBL and samples of the suspected material must be submitted to the Defra's Laboratory for EBL testing. Confirmation of the existence of the disease depends upon laboratory detection of the EBL virus.

Legislation

EBL was first made notifiable in Great Britain in 1977. Current legislation is The Enzootic Bovine Leukosis (England) Order 2000 which revokes and re-enacts the Enzootic Bovine Leukosis Order 1997 in England. The Order implements the provisions relating to milk of

Council Directive 64/432/EEC as amended on health problems affecting intra-Community trade in bovine animals and swine, and Council Directive 77/391/EEC as amended introducing Community measures for the eradication of brucellosis, tuberculosis and leukosis. These Directives require the operation of a monitoring and testing programme in order to maintain officially enzootic bovine leukosis-free status for Great Britain under Council Directive 64/432/EEC.

The principal changes made by this Order relate to the arrangements for testing milk for evidence of enzootic bovine leukosis and the removal of the list of approved laboratories that were contained in Schedule 1 to the 1997 Order. Notice must be given to the Divisional Veterinary Manager if any animal, carcass or laboratory sample is suspected of being infected with enzootic bovine leukosis. Article 6 sets out the duties of purchasers of milk in England in any form for resale to ensure that milk is sent for testing to an approved laboratory. The person in charge of an approved laboratory must notify the Secretary of State of any positive test results within 24 hours and negative test results within one month, and also maintain records of all tests carried out for a period of one year from the date of the test.

Failure to comply with any of the provisions of the Order is an offence under the Animal Health Act 1981.

Treatment

Treatment for EBL of cattle is not permitted. All infected cattle and contacts which have been exposed to infection must be slaughtered.

Information current of June 16, 2005