



# Livestock Notifiable Disease Factsheets

## Brucellosis (*Brucella abortus*)

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

### Definition

Brucellosis of cattle, known as "contagious abortion" is caused by infection with the bacterium *Brucella abortus*, which can also cause a disease of humans known as "undulant fever". Brucellosis of cattle is a notifiable disease which has been eradicated from cattle in Great Britain, the most recent case was in 1993 when it was reintroduced into a herd by infected imported cattle.

### Animals affected

*Brucella abortus* infects cattle and humans. Other species of the genus *Brucella* can infect other mammals, for example *Brucella melitensis* infects sheep and goats and can cause a disease in humans known as "malta fever", *Brucella suis* infects pigs. The laboratory isolation of any species of the genus *Brucella* must be reported (The Zoonoses Order 1989).

### Clinical signs

Brucellosis infection of cattle causes abortion or premature calving of recently infected animals; the foetus, placenta and uterine fluid contain large quantities of *Brucella abortus* bacteria which can infect other cattle coming into contact with an infected animal around the time of calving. The organism continues to be excreted in the milk; in the past humans were frequently infected through drinking unpasteurised milk. Breeding bulls which are infected, can transmit the disease to cows at the time of service by infected semen.

### Post-mortem appearance

Brucellosis of cattle produces no characteristic post mortem signs. Diagnosis is by laboratory testing of blood or milk samples and by laboratory culture of *Brucella abortus* from the placenta, vaginal discharge or the milk of infected cows.

### Precautions

Since brucellosis of cattle is still present in many countries including Ireland and several other countries of the European Union, prevention of brucellosis in Great Britain relies on thorough checks of imported cattle and continuing herd surveillance which is based on monthly testing of bulk milk samples from dairy herds and blood testing of beef breeding herds every two years.

Any cattle abortion or premature calving must be reported to the Divisional Veterinary Manager (DVM) or the duty Veterinary Officer (VO) at the Divisional Animal Health Office of Defra, so that an abortion enquiry to test for brucellosis can be carried out when necessary. It is good herd management practice for the owners of imported cattle to inform the DVM or

duty VO of the date that an imported female calves for the first time in Great Britain, so that a post calving check test can be arranged.

### **Treatment**

Treatment for brucellosis 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**