

Theileria and anaemia in cattle – the facts for farmers #1

September 2013

Carried by ticks

Cases of cattle being affected by the blood-borne parasite *Theileria orientalis*, which causes anaemia, have been on the increase since late 2012, particularly in the northern half of the North Island.

This is due to a likely increase in the number of ticks this season, which carry *Theileria*, and a new strain of the parasite called Ikeda.

So far, *Theileria* has only affected a very small proportion of New Zealand dairy herds, mainly in the North Island.

Location of cases

Most cases have been confirmed in Northland, Waikato, King Country and the Bay of Plenty. Cases have also been confirmed in Whanganui, Taranaki, Reporoa and Rangiora.

If animals are stressed or left untreated, *Theileria* can lead to death in cattle as their blood can't carry enough oxygen around the body.

Cows during calving have a changing requirement for energy as they transition to milking, and this along with changes to the immune system makes them more susceptible to the infection. Young calves (2-3 months) and recently calved cows are also more susceptible.

Slowing the spread

Theileria infection is caused by a parasite transmitted by ticks when they feed on the animal's blood – it is not passed on by cow-to-cow contact.

Cattle are at risk of infection when moved to areas where ticks are present. Likewise, if infected cattle are transported, they can spread infection to ticks in the new location.

Numbers of reported cases are still low and, at an individual herd level, impacts from *Theileria* are likely to reduce over time as cattle build up immunity to the new strain.

Prevention

- Regularly check all classes of stock for ticks. Look for them around the tail head, base of udder and inside the legs.
- Apply a tick control product specifically for cattle, following the advice of your veterinarian and/or product instructions. Talk to your veterinarian for options.
- Quarantine new stock coming on to your farm for seven days and treat them for ticks.

Signs of anaemia

- Cows straggling on the walk to the shed.
- Increased respiratory and heart rate.
- Pale, rather than healthy pink, vulva.
- Pale udder, yellow eyes.
- Cows have no strength or energy to do anything.

Treating affected cattle

- Minimise stress and movement of affected animals.
- Give affected animals easy to eat, high quality feed and plenty of water.
- Handle the affected cattle only when necessary.
- Treatments are available. Contact your veterinarian for advice.

Further advice is available

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

