



# BRUCELLOSIS

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### 1. What is bovine brucellosis?

Bovine brucellosis is a chronic disease of cattle caused by a bacterium called *Brucella abortus*. It is also known as contagious abortion because it often results in abortions and stillbirths in pregnant cattle. It can also cause infertility in herds of cattle and a decrease in milk production. However, some infected cattle can appear normal and healthy while still being able to spread the disease.

### 2. Which animals are affected by brucellosis?

Bovine brucellosis predominantly affects bovines like cattle, water buffalo, African buffalo and bison, but can infect other mammal species including humans. There are also other types of brucellosis that infect other species e.g. *Brucella mellitensis* in goats and *Brucella canis* in dogs.

### 3. How do cattle get infected with brucellosis?

When an infected cow aborts or calves, *Brucella* bacteria from the afterbirth and body fluids are released into the environment. Other cattle can become infected by contact with these body fluids and by consuming contaminated grazing. The calves born from an infected mother are often infected too.

### 4. How does brucellosis affect people?

People can become infected with brucellosis by contact with body fluids from an infected animal during slaughter or calving as well as by drinking unpasteurised milk from an infected cow. The disease in humans can cause chronic fever, flu-like symptoms, joint pain and infertility in both men and women. People can be treated with a combination of antibiotics, but if the disease is not diagnosed or treated early enough, it can become chronic and symptoms are life-long.

### 5. How is brucellosis controlled in cattle?

Brucellosis must be reported to the state veterinarian, as it is a controlled disease. When animals in a herd test positive for brucellosis, the whole herd is considered as infected, as infected animals often take a long time to test positive. Eradication of brucellosis from a herd is difficult and usually takes several years. There is no treatment for infected animals and they must be slaughtered.

### 6. How can I protect my animals from brucellosis?

It is compulsory by law to vaccinate all heifer calves between 4-8 months against bovine brucellosis with a registered vaccine (S19 from OBP or RB51 from MSD). Older heifers and cows can still be vaccinated with RB51 after 8 months of age. Bulls should not be vaccinated.



Brucellosis can be prevented from entering a herd by practicing good principles of biosecurity. New animals should be bought from herds with a negative herd test for brucellosis in the past year and proof of vaccination of heifers.

## 7. How do I know if my food is safe?

Meat from animals that are slaughtered at registered abattoirs is safe to eat. Pasteurised milk is safe to drink, as the pasteurization process destroys Brucella bacteria. Meat that is not slaughtered at a registered abattoir may not be safe to eat and should be cooked thoroughly until well done to reduce the risk. Raw milk should be boiled before drinking.

### CONTACTS:

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