

Mycoplasma bovis – Frequently asked questions

Animals

1. What should I do if I suspect an animal is infected with *Mp. bovis*?

Call your vet in the first instance if you see anything unusual and if you believe it's an exotic disease, call the MPI exotic disease hotline on **0800 80 99 66** (or ask the vet to do it on your behalf). More information on what to look out for is available here:

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/20894-poster-of-mycoplasma-bovis-what-to-look-out-for>

2. How can I tell if the animals I am buying are infected with *Mp. bovis*?

MPI has tested thousands of farms and any that have tested positive or pose significant concern are under movement restrictions. On that basis, the risk of buying infected stock is low. However, as good general biosecurity practice, you should also ask questions about the provenance of the animals including herd health history and rates of mastitis and any unusual signs of disease. A checklist has been prepared to help people purchasing stock:

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/19478-pre-purchase-checklist-mycoplasma-bovis>

3. How do I know if my neighbour's livestock have the disease?

We encourage you to talk to your neighbour. In any case, it's recommended that you do not permit the neighbours' stock to come into nose to nose contact with your animals. If you can avoid this type of contact, the status of the neighbours' stock becomes almost irrelevant.

4. Do farmers legally have to say whether he/she is under any form of movement restrictions from MPI? i.e. has a mob on the property that could be/ is infected?

No but he/she cannot legally move stock off the property.

5. Why can't we be told the identities of those farms which have tested positive?

Farmers whose animals test positive for livestock diseases can feel a great sense of fear and anxiety about what the future holds. This is a bad enough situation to find yourself in, let alone knowing that this information would be made public to their own community.

Protecting anonymity is also important to make sure that farmers' do the right thing when they see suspicious disease signs in their animals and report it to MPI (this is also why compensation is payable for disease control actions carried out under the Biosecurity Act). Without this protection, some farmers may avoid reporting disease, which creates serious implications for finding out early and limiting the silent spread phase. It is the size of silent spread (i.e. before the authorities realise and initiate control measures) which frequently determines the overall cost and damage caused by disease outbreaks.

6. How can I mitigate/reduce the risk of the disease when bringing in multiple mobs to the yards?

This is difficult because effective cleaning and disinfection of yards is not practical in many cases. Not running different mobs through yards on the same day may help reduce risk but the most important thing to remember is that *Mp. bovis* is not common. It has only been detected on

approximately 30 farms countrywide, despite highly intensive surveillance and testing. This should reassure farmers that the risks associated with mingling stock in yards is low. *Mp. bovis* is also spread via close and repeated contact.

7. What are the recommended guidelines/procedures if a cow ends up in the wrong mob?

Keep a record of the event and NAIT numbers of animals involved. A one-off event like this is lower risk than mixing entire mobs for a prolonged period. Remember, *Mp. bovis* is not widespread and a random animal from a property not under official controls mixing with your stock is highly unlikely to lead to transfer of *Mp. bovis*.

8. If we have to learn to live with *Mp. bovis*, can infected calves live to old enough / up to good weights before kill at works?

Yes. The majority of infected calves never show any signs of disease. *Mp. bovis* requires several factors to come together to produce clinical disease. Please see the predictive impact assessment on beef for more details <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/21386-potential-impact-of-mycoplasma-bovis-on-the-nz-beef-sector>. Stress and poorer general condition are key factors that produce the right conditions for *Mp. bovis* to lead to signs of disease.

9. What is the risk of the disease being contracted from sale yards?

Low, please see above.

Eradication

10. Is there a realistic prospect of the disease being eradicated?

That is what our industry investment is intended to help MPI determine – MPI advises that a decision about the future of *Mp. bovis* in NZ is anticipated to be made in April /May.

11. Who makes the decision to eradicate or contain the disease?

We anticipate that this will be a joint decision made by MPI and the affected industries.

12. When will the decision be made?

April/May has been proposed for when sufficient testing and tracing information will be available to make an informed decision. As the network of confirmed positive farms continues to be uncovered, this may be an increasingly challenging deadline to meet.

Impact

13. What is the likely impact on the beef industry if the disease cannot be eradicated?

We understand that these will be minimal owing to our extensive production systems and all-in-all-out style of calf rearing. The industries and MPI prepared an assessment of the likely impact on production that can be found here <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/21386-potential-impact-of-mycoplasma-bovis-on-the-nz-beef-sector>

Beef + Lamb New Zealand support

14. What is Beef + Lamb New Zealand doing to support farmers?

B+LNZ is sharing information about meetings, events, progression of the response and providing advice on biosecurity. We're also helping to develop guidance for farmers about protecting farms from *Mp. bovis*, liaising with MPI on the response to ensure farmer issues are raised and dealt with, peer-reviewing response decision making and providing a critical review of policy analyses including an import pathways report. We have also participated in the development of cost benefit analyses and response options for the future. B+LNZ is on hand to answer farmers' questions about response policy and assisting rural shows and events in obtaining advice from MPI.

15. How much has Beef + Lamb New Zealand spent on the disease response so far? How much have you budgeted?

We are calculating our investment to date and will let farmers know in due course.

NAIT

16. Has NAIT been effective?

For a range of reasons (complexity of NAIT and a low level of enforcement among them), some farmers have not met their legal obligations, putting other farmers and their industries at risk. This is disappointing. In future, we need more visible interventions to ensure compliance is lifted and maintained and for the NAIT system to be easier to use. Industry groups and the government are already working on these improvements.

However, it should be recognised that where good information has been provided to NAIT, this has been extremely useful in assisting officials in tracing animal movements. B+LNZ strongly encourages farmers to continue to keep NAIT records complete and accurate.

Guidance on using NAIT is available here: <http://www.nait.co.nz/help-and-support/tutorial-videos/>

Disease background

17. How did the disease arrive in New Zealand?

This is currently unknown, but MPI is still investigating. It is common in livestock disease outbreaks for no source ever to be identified with certainty.

18. How many strains of *Mp. bovis* are in NZ?

We believe only one, pointing to a common source.

19. Is the impact of *Mp. bovis* worse because the NZ herd is naïve? And if it was here to stay, would the symptoms/effects settle down after a while?

No, the nature of *Mp. bovis* and its ability to partially evade the immune system means NZ herd is not anticipated to be significantly more impacted than animals overseas.

20. Can you create a map of *Mp. bovis* areas, like TB?

This is not appropriate for *Mp. bovis* which spreads directly between farms. TB maps describe vector risk areas, which fortunately play no known role in the spread of *Mp. bovis*.

21. What is the survival of *Mp. bovis* in soil/muck, effluent, UV?

Mp. bovis can survive in the environment for many weeks under the right conditions but is sensitive to dry conditions and U.V. It's important to remember that it's very unlikely that stock would become infected from contact with muck or effluent, as this is more of a theoretical risk than an established pathway by which new infections have been seen. In New Zealand, all cases of *M. bovis* to date are understood to have occurred through stock mixing with infected animals.

Testing

22. How do I test my animals? How accurate is it? How long does it take? How much does it cost? Where can I buy one?

Currently, there are no tests commercially available. MPI, vet labs and the industries are exploring how any test could be introduced and what regime and policies would need to accompany their use, for example, to manage inevitable issues associated with false positive results.

23. When do Bulk Milk results become available?

Results are available for many farms now

24. What are the different tests for *Mp. bovis*? What is the difference between testing calves and adults stock?

Different tests are available for milking animals and dry stock. Drystock tests are significantly less sensitive and tests for individuals are unavailable. Herd tests can be difficult to interpret and require multiple rounds of many tests before infectious status of the herd can be determined with reasonable certainty.

25. Are beef cows tested? Are all cattle through works tested?

No, the low sensitivity of detection means that little about herd status can be learned from testing a few animals at slaughter. Resources are not available to implement mass testing in the beef industry as this would divert testing away from response priorities and still would not capture many farms not sending animals to slaughter.

26. Why do results take so long?

There are multiple rounds and a complex interpretation of results is required.

27. Why is there no definite answer that a herd is NOT infected? What is the accuracy of the different tests?

We are seeking to further understand issues concerning tests and their application. However, it is known that available tests are not as sensitive as we would like, i.e. their ability to always detect herds where carrier stock are present could be better.

28. I want to get my own (non-lactating) animals tested. How do I do this?

This is currently unavailable from commercial labs but may be available in the future.

29. What is MPI doing for beef farmers, in particular, with testing?

Beef animals are low risk and the ability to detect the organism in beef animals is constrained because of issues with the available tests. General surveillance in the beef herd is not a response priority, which is relying on testing and tracing risk animal movements. Where these involve beef herds, these are tested.

Buying/selling

30. I want to trade stock. What do I need to consider so I can do this?

Mp. bovis is not common so any individual trade is likely to be low risk. You should seek to understand the provenance of stock and ask questions about the source and history of disease in the source farm and make sure all stock are NAIT compliant before buying/selling.

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/19478-pre-purchase-checklist-mycoplasma-bovis>

31. How much time between herds through yards, or in same paddock is required to reduce risk of transmission of *Mp. bovis* between mobs?

Our advice is the more time you can allow the better, evidence is not definitive about this but direct animal contact is known to be the main risk pathway (in addition to feeding contaminated milk) for transmission of *Mp. bovis* between farms.

32. What about showing cattle?

This is considered a low risk but good biosecurity and NAIT records must apply. Advice for shows has been developed: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/27534-minimising-the-risks-from-mycoplasma-bovis-at-cattle-shows-and-events>

Transport

33. Are dirty stock trucks a risk?

This is considered a low risk for *Mp. bovis* because the infection is not widespread. However, cleaner is better and it should become expected by all.

34. How can I be confident that the trucking company I use is following good biosecurity guidelines?

We're encouraging farmers to ask their truck company if they are taking the appropriate precautions. If they have any concerns, they should contact MPI. *Mp. bovis* is spread by repeated close contact with infected stock that are shedding the bacteria. It's worth remembering that *Mp. bovis* is understood to be present on only a very small minority of farms and that confinement on trucks previously used to transport stock with *Mp. bovis* is not viewed as a very high risk.

35. Why are there only rules for trucking companies when working with farms with movement restrictions put on them?

Because other movements are not considered sufficiently high risk to warrant enhanced cleaning and disinfection. If you want a clean truck, we encourage you to require it as part of commercial arrangements.

Farm systems and practices

36. What about the risk from water troughs at yards or reticulated water systems?

There are lots of benefits from having stock able to access clean drinking water so it's a good idea anyway. *Mp. bovis* is not common so transmission via drinking water is considered low risk.

37. What will MPI do when a herd on winter grazing is put under restrictions (at the end of winter)?

We are uncertain and will be discussing this with MPI

38. How can we get the best possible assurance of sending/receiving stock being "clear" of *Mp. bovis*?

We encourage you to ask for details about herd health status. MPI would prohibit movements off infected properties so it is unlikely that infection will come with *Mp. bovis*. The infection is also not widespread.

39. How long should I disinfect for in winter?

This disease is not primarily driven by environmental exposure to bacteria – it usually requires infected stock, so this is not considered a major issue.

40. What are the recommendations on biosecurity measures between herds on winter grazing properties?

All the existing do's and don'ts (see links under useful resources below) including keeping different mobs separate and preventing fence line contact. Keeping good records of how mobs have been kept separate is a very good idea.

Measures

41. Will Cook Strait close?

This is unlikely. There is already at least one case in the North Island that has tested positive and other investigations are ongoing, so the disease is already in both islands. In any case, closing the Cook Strait may lead to a significant disruption of local trade and may have implications for export markets. The costs and benefits of such measures will need to be considered as part of the long term planning for how *Mp. bovis* will be managed or eradicated.

42. Does the recent announcement that infected herds will be culled signal that eradication will be pursued?

No, we understand that MPI took this decision to reduce disease pressure. We have great sympathy for those farmers affected and also recognise that, for many of them, having certainty about the immediate future will be welcomed.

Industry contribution

43. Why should all beef farmers have to contribute \$ to the industry response?

Although the impact of the disease on beef production is understood to be significantly lower than for dairy, there are likely to be small impacts. Under the Government Industry Agreement, public spending on biosecurity that benefits industries needs to be accompanied by industry contributions. The alternative is for the Crown to decide to no longer fund a response to a production disease.

44. Do we get a say/vote on contributing?

On approving in principle to fund part of the industry share of \$11.2 million, B+LNZ set a number of conditions on that contribution, including having a voice in decision making and that beef farmers should pay no more than a fair share. The precise mechanics of what response decision rights for *Mp. bovis* look like are not finalised but it is our expectation that these will mirror agreements reached under the GIA framework. Of the approximately 250 submissions we received, more than 85% farmers supported a proposal last year for B+LNZ to sign a GIA for Biosecurity Readiness and Response Deed.

45. How will the \$ be collected, will it be via a biosecurity levy?

The details of how much beef industry funding is appropriate and how it could be collected are currently being worked through by the industries and MPI. A Biosecurity Act levy would be the likely route.

46. How much will I and the beef industry have to pay?

We don't know yet, but our expectation based on initial assessments of the impacts of *Mp. bovis* on beef production is: a minor share relative to other industries.

47. How much will industries likely pay in total to control this disease?

It is important to note that the \$11.2 million contribution from industry is for initial phase of the response up until a decision is made about whether the disease can be eradicated or should only be controlled. We do not know what the decision will be after July and therefore what industries' long-term contribution may be.

Useful resources:

- **Protect Your Farm from *Mp. bovis***

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/19148-protect-your-farm-from-mycoplasma-bovis>

- **General Drystock Biosecurity guidance**

<http://beeflambnz.com/knowledge-hub/PDF/drystock-biosecurity-guidelines>

- **Biosecurity Checklist for Sheep and Beef farmers**

<https://beeflambnz.com/knowledge-hub/PDF/biosecurity-wof-checklist>

- **Ministry for Primary Industries *Mp. bovis* webpage**

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/protection-and-response/responding/alerts/mycoplasma-bovis/>