

Q What is leptospirosis?

A. Leptospirosis is a contagious bacterial infection of animals, including cattle and sheep, caused by *Leptospira* bacteria. After infection the bacteria can localise in the reproductive tract and in the kidneys. The agent is passed in the urine and infection spreads when cattle are exposed directly or indirectly via water courses to urine from infected animals.

Q What are the signs of leptospirosis?

A. Leptospirosis is associated with infertility and abortion in both beef and dairy herds and has been identified as a cause of milk drop. Leptospirosis can also affect humans, and is one of most significant occupational risks to farm workers.

Q Where does infection come from?

A. The bacteria are present in the reproductive tract and kidneys and are shed in the urine. The organisms may enter streams and other water courses from contaminated pasture; piped water is safest. Major risk factors for introducing infection into a herd are through movement and purchase of infected animals onto the farm and close interaction between two maintenance host species (i.e. cattle and sheep). Chronic carriers of leptospirosis may appear completely normal, yet persistently shed infection in their urine.

Q What can be done about leptospirosis?

A. Where good biosecurity is possible, a test and cull scheme may be used to achieve disease-free status. All breeding animals over the age of 1 year should be tested. A herd that achieves two clear tests at least 6 months apart can be classed as leptospirosis accredited under the CHeCS rules. In other circumstances vaccination can be used to control leptospirosis although this is not compatible with accreditation. Antibiotic treatment can be used to treat infected animals – this should be discussed with your veterinary surgeon.

If you would like to know more about leptospirosis testing, please do not hesitate to contact the Cattle Health Scheme Manager or the Veterinary Team at Biobest.

Biobest Laboratories Ltd

Providing specialist virology and serology services to the cattle industry

Tel: +44 (0)131 440 2628 (Edinburgh) +44 (0)1856 878 293 (Orkney)

Email: hihealthherdcare@biobest.co.uk www.biobest.co.uk