



Testing for Johne's Disease

The key to controlling Johne's Disease is the identification of those animals most likely to be infectious and managing them in such a way as to reduce the risk of them infecting other cattle. The tests currently recommended to detect infected cattle are;

- Individual animal milk tests
- Individual animal blood tests
- Individual animal dung tests.

Herds testing for Johne's Disease should test all adult animals over 2 years of age. Initial screening of cattle should be carried out using either blood or milk tests. Currently it is recommended that all adult cattle are tested using, as a minimum, either one blood test or two milk tests per year. Faecal tests should be used as ancillary tests to clarify the infection status of blood or milk test positive animals. Faeces can be tested using either culture or PCR.

How easily infected animals can be identified using any of the available tests depends on the stage of the disease. During the earliest stages of infection most infected animals will test negative using all the available tests. Therefore, there is little value in testing animals less than 2 years of age. As the infection progresses it becomes easier to detect and the likelihood of the animal being a source of infection for other animals also increases. To detect animals that are infected and initially undetectable using current tests it is important

that all adult animals undergo repeated testing over a number of years.

The blood and milk tests that are available can be influenced by other factors, particularly the TB skin test. During the 3 months following a TB test, milk and blood tests can give false positive reactions. Therefore, it is important that where possible these tests are not used during the 3 months following the TB skin test, including the second day of the TB test. Also, milk should not be tested from cows during the first week of lactation. Occasionally other related bacteria can give false positive reactions with blood and milk tests. In all cases it is important to discuss the test results with your veterinary practitioner.

Animals with any positive test results should be treated as a potential source of infection for calves and managed to prevent transmission. For example, as a minimum, cows that have a positive test result should not be permitted to calve where other test negative cows will calve and their colostrum and milk should not be used to feed any calf that will be retained for breeding purposes.

Testing for Johne's Disease is a valuable aid to the control of Johne's Disease. However, **testing on its own is insufficient to control the infection**. It is crucial that tests are used as part of a strategic control programme, which includes measures to reduce the risk of infection transmission between and within herds.