

Husbandry best practice advice to help reduce the risk of bovine TB transmission from cattle to cattle and between badgers and cattle

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The advice below has been developed by the Bovine TB Husbandry Working Group in partnership with Defra. The Working Group was set up to identify appropriate and practical advice from evidence and experience. Members were drawn from the [National Farmers Union](#), the [British Cattle Veterinary Association](#), the [Wildlife Trusts](#), the [Soil Association](#), [Animal Health](#) (formerly the State Veterinary Service), the [Welsh Assembly Government](#), the [Central Science Laboratory](#) and [Defra](#).

Maintaining good husbandry practices is important in reducing the risk of bovine TB transmission. This advice suggests some common sense, precautionary measures that you can take. All farms are different so it is important to discuss with your vet and decide on measures to implement that are best suited to your farm. If your farm has never experienced bovine TB, or not recently, it is still advisable to undertake precautionary measures against possible infection from badgers and from brought-in infection from purchased or hired cattle.

Following a trawl of existing advice and research, the Group has highlighted a list of measures based on their usefulness, practicality and cost effectiveness. The aim has been to keep suggestions as low cost as possible.

This advice is about reducing the risk of direct or indirect transmission of bovine TB. There is a cumulative effect to be gained from implementing the suggested measures. Maintaining good animal husbandry practices is not the only preventative measure to reduce the risk of getting bTB. Routine surveillance, testing and slaughter of suspect cattle are essential as well as compliance with pre-movement testing.

All farms are different. Below are suggestions of practical ways you can help protect your cattle, by implementing good husbandry practices:

Keeping badgers away from stored cattle feed

- Make walls and doors of feed stores secure, especially if they are used for storage of straights or include concentrate feed.
- Ensure feed-store doors are shut, especially in the evening / at night as this is the peak time for badger visits.
- Ensure doors and walls of feed-stores have no gaps and are inaccessible to badgers.
- If your feed store is accessible to badgers and too costly to modify consider storing your feed in a different building or in secure containers
- If building a new feed-store, consider ways of preventing wildlife access.

- Be aware that badger carcasses in the farmyard are a potential source of disease and dispose of them sensibly.

Make farmyards less attractive to badgers

- Avoid leaving feed easily accessible in the farm yard as this is an attraction to badgers.
- Avoid feeding cattle on the ground in the farmyard. Consider ways of preventing badgers from gaining access to feed.
- While it may be difficult to keep badgers out of cattle housing completely, it makes sense where possible to make cattle housing more difficult for badgers to access.
- Ensure silage clamps are well covered and consider protecting the open face by electric netting at times when access is not needed.

Be aware of high risk areas at pasture

- Be aware that feeding at pasture may be a higher risk than feeding in the farmyard. Avoid feeding concentrates on the ground at pasture.
- Be aware of high risk areas such as badger latrines and active setts at pasture
- Be aware that certain forms of grazing can be more of a risk. Intensive grazing in particular may encourage cattle to feed at field margins where there is a greater risk of contamination from badger faeces and urine at badger latrines. Avoid allowing cattle access to woodland.
- Feed troughs can become contaminated by wildlife so keep an eye out for such signs of contamination and clean these out regularly
- If you use molassed blocks, consider taking measures to make them more difficult for badgers to access e.g suspending them
- Be aware that badger carcasses at pasture are a potential source of disease and dispose of them sensibly.

Keeping cattle away from other cattle herds

- Ensure perimeter fencing, including gateways, are adequate to prevent nose-to-nose contact with cattle on neighbouring farms. Common grazing, nose-to-nose contact at shared water courses etc are areas of particular risk for disease transmission between cattle.
- Be aware that there is a risk of disease transmission from hired or shared bulls.

Protect your herd

- Check the TB status of farms from where you buy your cattle (both the testing interval and the date of the last 2 tests). Always ask for appropriate evidence of testing and TB status for all bought in cattle
- Where possible breed your own replacements and / or use Artificial Insemination (AI) where practical
- Adhere to isolation regulations for any inconclusive or reactor animals Isolate inconclusive as well as reactor animals separately from the herd and

adhere to any statutory notice regarding cleansing and disinfecting after removal of reactors.

These are all suggested actions for you to consider and you may wish to discuss with your vet. All general good practice helps to reduce the risk of animal diseases including bovine TB, for example: providing good ventilation in cattle housing, not overstocking cattle when housed (or at grass), following guidelines on cleansing and disinfecting and providing cattle with a balanced nutritional diet.

Bovine TB Transmission

We know a lot about bovine TB but there is still much to learn about this complex disease. TB is mainly a respiratory disease, caught by breathing in the bacteria and direct transmission can occur through, for example, nose to nose contact. We know transmission of bTB occurs from cattle to cattle; from badgers to cattle and cattle to badgers; and badger to badger. There is also evidence that indirect transmission is possible, for example through contact with saliva, urine, droppings, pus from abscesses etc.

However, we don't understand and it is difficult to identify the relative importance of each route of transmission of the disease. For this reason this advice emphasises that efforts should be made to reduce the risk of cattle and badgers coming into contact.

Why is it important to keep badgers away from cattle feed?

Evidence suggests that transmission between badgers and cattle is possible through cattle investigating and/or eating contaminated feed or fodder (indirect transmission).

Research has found that badgers regularly visit farm buildings to feed. This is particularly true during dry, warm periods when the ground is hard and one of their preferred food sources (earthworms) is more difficult to find. Unprotected food sources may be contaminated by foraging badgers if they are carrying TB. There is a particular risk from badgers if they are in the advanced stages of TB since they shed bacteria and are more likely to look for easily accessible food and shelter.

Why you should protect your herd by careful sourcing of stock and adherence to isolation procedures

It's important to ensure as best you can that the cattle you buy are healthy and free from disease. Cattle rarely show obvious clinical signs of bovine TB, and it is normally only detected by test results or at the slaughter house. Asking for dates

and appropriate evidence of previous tests for all bought in cattle and the history of the herd will allow you to make judgements on that basis. If your herd has been free of infection for a long time, it is possible that local badgers are also free of infection. Be aware, however, that infection in your cattle could result in the local badgers becoming infected and the cycle of infection becoming established in your area. In these circumstances it is much more difficult to clear TB from your herd and endangers other farms in the area. This is why so much emphasis is placed on adherence to official instructions, for example, isolation procedures for any inconclusive or reactor cattle to prevent bovine TB spreading in your herd.

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