

The cost of IBR in the dairy herd

Maria Guelbenzu, IBR Programme Manager

- ▶ **IBR is widespread in Ireland.**
- ▶ **IBR can give rise to significant economic losses in farms.**
- ▶ **Subclinical infections may still be associated with a reduction in milk yield.**
- ▶ **IBR is costing the Irish dairy industry approximately €62 million annually.**

Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) is widespread in Ireland where there is evidence that 75% of cattle herds have been exposed to the virus. IBR is a highly infectious disease of cattle caused by bovine herpesvirus 1 (BoHV-1) that can give rise to significant economic losses in farms.

IBR spreads typically by close contact between animals although airborne spread of virus may occur over distances of up to 5 metres and it can also be spread by using contaminated semen, equipment and by people. Clinical signs may include dullness and reduced appetite, high temperature, rapid and loud breathing, sometimes with coughing, fluid discharge from nose and eyes, inflammation of the throat and, on occasion, death. Infection can also be accompanied by sudden reduced milk production, abortion, nervous signs (normally only in young calves). However, it is also recognised that, in herds with endemic infection, the course of infection can be sub-clinical but nevertheless, still be associated with a reduction in milk yield and negative reproductive outcomes.

IBR ERADICATION PROGRAMME

Animal Health Ireland, 2-5 The Archways, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, N41 WN27



While the economic impact of infection may be greatest following initial introduction into a herd, there are also ongoing losses in herds with established infection, as susceptible cattle are exposed to the virus. In dairy herds a reduction in milk yield can also be a significant outcome of infection and in some cases, the main presenting sign.

Several studies have investigated the effects that exposure to this virus can have on milk production. One study that looked into the effect of IBR outbreaks on milk production in free dairy herds in the Netherlands, found that losses averaged 0.92kg of milk per cow per day during a 9-week period. Another study explored the potential economic impact of subclinical IBR infection in the UK and found that IBR-seropositive cows produced 2.6 kg per day less milk over two years (study period) compared with cows that were seronegative.

An Irish study found that in infected dairy herds recorded a reduction in milk yield, as well as in milk fat and protein, highlighting sub-optimal milk production in positive herds. It concluded that profitability was reduced by an average of €60 per cow per year, aggregating to a national figure of €62M of foregone profit.

Where to get more advice on IBR?

Detailed information leaflets on IBR and herd biosecurity, along with answers to frequently asked questions on IBR and specific guidance for herds with bull calves that are potential AI sires, are available from the IBR section of the Animal Health Ireland website [click here](#).

