

# Redwater infection in cattle

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**R**edwater is a severe life-threatening disease of cattle caused by a parasite called *Babesia divergens*. The disease is transmitted by a tick that is commonly found in Ireland, particularly in the west and along the Shannon river system. Keeping pastures well managed can prevent animals being bitten by ticks and infected with the disease, although margins near hedges may still be a suitable environment for ticks. Recent studies have shown that the disease is declining in Ireland but this means farmers and vets may be less familiar with the clinical signs.

## How will I know if an animal has redwater?

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After an animal is bitten by a redwater-infected tick, it can take up to three weeks to show any signs of disease.

Early stage signs:

- Animals staying away from the group.
- Reduced appetite.
- High temperature.
- Frothy urine with a red-brownish colour.
- Diarrhoea (often 'pipe-stem diarrhoea' passed as a thin jet).

Later stage signs:

- Weakness/staggering, animal unable to stand.
- Changes in colour of gums and under eyelids to very pale (anaemic) or yellow (jaundice).
- Normal urine colour.
- Constipation.
- Death.

Animals on pasture should be carefully monitored for signs of disease, particularly during spring or autumn, especially if they have been recently introduced to the herd. Animals can die quickly following the first appearance of signs of infection.

## What should be done if I suspect an animal has redwater?

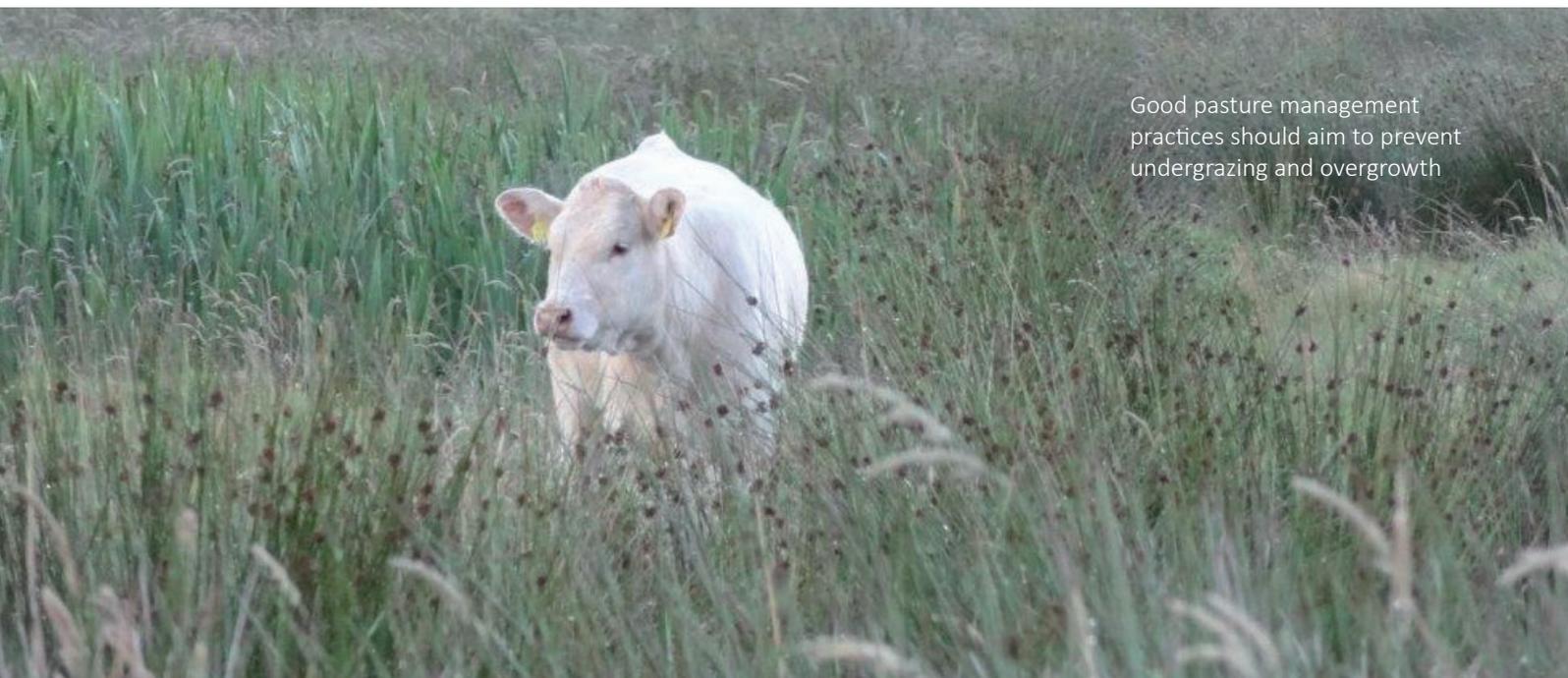
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Call your veterinary practitioner immediately. An early diagnosis and veterinary treatment are key to survival for the animal. Treatment may include an injection of imidocarb dipropionate to kill the parasite. This drug has a withdrawal period of 213 days for meat and 21 days for milk. Poorly nourished animals, pregnant cows and animals without previous exposure to redwater parasites tend to be more severely affected.

## How can redwater be prevented?

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- Minimise dense vegetation and under-grazed rough pasture which are favourable areas for ticks. Follow good pasture management practices to prevent under-grazing and overgrowth. Clear scrub, ferns and rushes from grazing land. Ticks can persist on the margins of reclaimed fields.
- Keep susceptible cattle out of tick-infested areas. High risk periods are April-May and August-October but mild, wet weather can allow tick activity to continue through the summer.
- Expose cattle to tick areas before 6 months of age or buy-in animals that have previously grazed tick-infested areas. Calves show natural resistance to redwater and tend to not develop clinical disease under 6 months of age. Calves over 6 to 9 months of age that have not been exposed to redwater ticks and are introduced to tick-infested areas are highly susceptible to infection and serious illness.
- Specific preventative measures such as topical tick treatments or preventive drug treatment can be used to prevent disease. Speak to your veterinary practitioner on the best approach.



Good pasture management practices should aim to prevent undergrazing and overgrowth