

SPREAD OF JOHNE'S DISEASE (JD) THE RISK TO YOUR FARM FROM ANIMAL MOVEMENTS

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The Irish Johne's Control Programme (IJCP) advises that purchasing or moving animals between herds increases the risk of spreading *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis* (MAP), the bacteria responsible for Johne's disease. This risk grows with both the number of animals introduced and the variety of source herds they come from.

To minimise this risk:

- Limit animal purchases as much as possible.
- Implement biosecurity measures to prevent within-herd infection, even if Johne's disease (JD) is not yet apparent.

Reducing the risk of infection

Avoid bringing animals onto your farm whenever possible. Instead of purchasing a bull, consider using artificial insemination (AI), and where feasible, breed your own replacement females. If replacements must be reared off-site, choose a farm that does not contract-rear other animals.

If purchasing is unavoidable, source animals from herds participating in the IJCP with negative test results, or from herds certified by CheCS or another assurance program. Minimise the number of different herds you buy from to reduce the likelihood of introducing infection.



Bringing a bull onto your farm

As breeding season is not far away many farmers will be getting organised for this busy period. Many farms operate closed herd policies, with the exception being bulls brought in to help increase the efficiency of the breeding period. However, in terms of JD what should you consider when you bring a bull onto your farm.

- Request the herd test history for JD from the farm you purchase the bull from.
- Buy from herds with a low risk of Johne's disease.
- Remember there can be JD risk from both beef and dairy bulls.
- Buy as few animals as possible.
- Avoid sharing or leasing breeding bulls.
- Quarantine new stock.
- Keep new stock away from young stock.
- In the case of Johne's disease, it is of little value testing a young bull under two years old for JD. Even if a bull does have JD, he may test clear at this age, only for the disease to become apparent at a later stage.

The link between expanding your herd and Johne's Disease (JD)

If you have previously introduced animals to expand your herd or diversify genetics, there is a chance you may have unknowingly brought MAP onto your farm. Data from IJCP testing shows that infection is more common in dairy herds that have expanded or been established through animal purchases in the past five years. Once introduced, the infection spreads within the herd, with disease progression occurring over time.

Even before clinical signs - such as reduced milk production, weight loss, diarrhoea, or death appear, herds with a history of purchasing animals tend to have higher rates of positive test results and stronger test readings. Research confirms that Johne's disease spreads slowly at first but accelerates if left uncontrolled, particularly under herd stress.

Proactive management and testing

Implementing biosecurity controls early can help slow JD progression and limit its impact. Maintaining a closed herd remains the most effective control strategy – but remember the bull – it only takes the movement of one JD infectious animal into your herd to introduce the infection.

If you have a closed herd this is something really worth protecting! The IJCP provides testing to help assess infection levels and implement practical, cost-effective control measures. All cattle herds in Ireland, especially those that have purchased cattle, can benefit from participating.

**For more information about preventing JD getting into your herd, speak to your veterinary practitioner or refer to the IJCP webpages, [Click here](#).
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