Bovine Tuberculosis FAQs

What is bovine tuberculosis?

Bovine tuberculosis is a contagious chronic bacterial infection caused by the bacterium, *Mycobacterium bovis (M. bovis)*. This is a different strain of bacteria than the one that usually causes TB in humans *(Mycobacterium tuberculosis or M. tuberculosis)*. The disease causes chronic debilitation and weight loss, and typically affects the respiratory system of affected animals. Given the chronic nature of the disease, animals may be infected and not show clinical symptoms until advanced stages of the disease. In Canada, bovine TB is a reportable disease under the *Health of Animals Act,* and all cases must be reported to the CFIA.

What species are susceptible to bovine tuberculosis?

Bovine tuberculosis primarily affects domestic cattle, however, other domestic species such as goats, pigs, cats, and dogs, and species of wildlife including bison, elk, moose, and deer are also susceptible. The disease can infect most warm-blooded animals including humans, although cases in species other than cattle, elk, and bison are rare. Although bovine TB has been detected in scavenging species such as coyotes, bobcat, fox, and bear, it is not believed the disease can remain endemic in these species.

Is bovine tuberculosis (bTB) transmissible to humans?

While it is possible for bovine TB to spread from animals to people, the likelihood is extremely rare. Humans may acquire bovine tuberculosis through the consumption of unpasteurized milk and dairy products. Eating beef is not considered a risk for bovine TB due to rigorous food safety practices followed within the meat processing industry. Sporadic cases may result from inadvertent exposure of abattoir workers, veterinarians and wild game handlers to infected animals. There have been four known documented cases of bovine TB transmission from a white-tailed deer to human through exposure during the field dressing process. Hunters are encouraged to practice routine hygiene precautions while handling wildlife, including regular hand washing and cleaning of knives and equipment, and ensuring meat is well cooked.

What are signs and symptoms of bovine TB in animals?

The bacteria associated with the disease may lie dormant in an infected animal for years without causing clinical signs or progressive disease symptoms. It can reactivate during periods of stress or in older animals. When disease becomes progressive, it generally results in enlarged lesions which may be found in a variety of tissues including lymph nodes of the head and thorax, lung, spleen, and liver. In late stages of disease, animals may exhibit progressive weight loss, loss of appetite, weakness, lethargy, low-grade fever, intermittent cough and laboured breathing.

What are signs and symptoms of bovine TB in people?

In people, symptoms of TB disease caused by *M. bovis* are similar to the symptoms of TB caused by *M. tuberculosis.* Symptoms can include fever, night sweats and weight loss, but other symptoms might occur depending on the part of the body affected by the disease. Not all TB infections progress to TB disease, so people may have no symptoms at all.

People who spend extended periods in close contact with animals that might carry *M. bovis* should promptly seek medical attention for any illness with symptoms of TB disease as described above and ensure that their health care providers are aware that they work in close contact with animals.

Has bovine tuberculosis been detected in wildlife in North America?

Bovine tuberculosis is endemic in populations of wood bison in Wood Bison National Park and the Slave River Lowlands of the Northwest Territories and white-tailed deer in Michigan. It was endemic in elk and white-tailed deer in and around Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba for 20 years, until sustained management efforts allowed for the successful gradual elimination of bTB from this ecosystem. The disease was detected in Minnesota white-tailed deer in 2005, however, it has not been detected there since 2009. Outside of North America, the disease is endemic in badgers in the UK and Ireland, brush-tailed possums in New Zealand, and wild boar in Spain. Wild cervids can acquire bovine TB from other

infected animals through contact with respiratory secretions and other bodily fluids. This can occur through direct contact with another animal, or through contaminated environmental sources. The infectious bacterium can remain viable in the environment for many months, especially in moist and cool conditions. Shared feed sources are believed to be the primary pathway of transmission between wild deer and cattle. Bovine TB has never been detected in wildlife in Saskatchewan.

Has bovine TB previously been detected in cattle in Canada?

Bovine TB is a reportable disease in Canada and has been subject to a mandatory national eradication program since 1923. While Canada is considered to be officially free of bovine TB today, isolated cases in cattle may occur. Previous to the detection in two separate Saskatchewan cattle farms in 2023 and 2024, bovine tuberculosis had been detected in beef cattle in British Columbia (2011, 2018) and Alberta (2016). In June of 2025, bovine TB was detected in a dairy cattle herd in Manitoba.

The disease is a concern to the cattle industry, and can have significant impacts on agricultural economy, wildlife management, and public health.

How do you test for bovine TB in animals?

Routine surveillance for bovine TB in cattle is through a national slaughter inspection program. In suspect cases on cattle farms, live-animal testing can be performed via an intradermal (tuberculin) skin test. In wildlife, bovine TB testing is done by examining lymph nodes and respiratory tracts from harvested animals.

How do you test for bovine TB in people?

People who have been exposed to an animal with *M. bovis* infection should talk to their healthcare providers about whether they should be screened for TB infection. Screening tests include the tuberculin skin test (TST) and the interferon-gamma release assay (blood test).

What if I suspect bovine TB in an animal I harvested?

The lesions recognizable to hunters vary by species and may include round small to large white, tan, or yellow crumbly to paste-like and gritty nodules throughout the lungs, the rib cage, or in the chest cavity. Some lymph nodes may also appear enlarged. If a hunter suspects bovine TB like lesions, they are advised to collect a photograph and contact the Ministry of Environment inquiry line at 1-800-567-4224 or the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative at 306-966-5815. Photos and reports can also be submitted online at https://cwhc.wildlifesubmissions.org/#/ or through the "Wildlife Health Tracker" app. Hunters can reduce personal risk by wearing rubber gloves when field dressing and washing their hands afterwards. Cooking meat thoroughly prior to consumption destroys the bacteria.

What is being done to mitigate the spread of this disease?

The National Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication Program has limited the spread of the disease in the livestock industry since its inception in 1923.

The cattle herd that was confirmed positive for bovine TB in 2023 has been depopulated to prevent further spread. The CFIA investigation is complete, and no additional infected premises were found. The more recent cattle herd that was confirmed positive for bovine TB in Saskatchewan in 2024 has been depopulated and the investigation is currently in progress.

Why is bovine TB testing mandatory?

The province is conducting mandatory bovine TB surveillance in collaboration with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) during the 2025-26 hunting season. Wildlife disease surveillance is a component of disease investigation in response to a reportable disease detection in livestock. To ensure wildlife populations are bovine TB-free, the sample size must be large enough to provide a 95 per cent confidence of detecting the disease if the disease is present in the population at a prevalence greater than one per cent.

The number of samples received through voluntary disease surveillance is often insufficient to achieve the required sample size. In 2024-25, the Ministry of Environment initiated mandatory bovine TB surveillance in WMZ 37 and 48 in response to the detection of bovine TB in a cattle herd in the region in 2023. A total of 292 samples were collected (214 elk, 70 white-tailed deer, six mule deer, two moose). Sample size targets in WMZ 48 were met, however, sample size targets in WMZ 37 were insufficient. As such and in response to a second detection of bovine Tb in a separate cattle herd in 2024, the province has implemented mandatory bovine TB surveillance for draw and regular season elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer harvested in WMZ 37 and 39 for the 2025-26 hunting season. Additionally, CWD testing will be mandatory for draw and regular season elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer in WMZ 43, 47, 50, and 55. Moose harvested in these zones will be tested on a voluntary basis.

For more information please visit, saskatchewan.ca/bovinetb.

Additional Bovine Tb Resources:

Bovine Tuberculosis in Wild White-tailed Deer, FNR-551-W publication, Purdue Extension – Forestry & Natural Resources

Bovine Tb, Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)

Bovine Tb, Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH)

Bovine TB in Cattle, USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Bovine TB in Cervids, USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Bovine Tb, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Bovine Tb, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Bovine TB fact sheet, Canadian Food Inspection Agency

More info?

Contact the Client Service Office at
Tel: 1-800-567-4224 (toll-free)
or 306-787-2584
Email: centre.inquiry@gov.sk.ca