

Goats and Johne's Disease

Some basic information

What is Johne's disease?

It is a serious wasting disease. Essentially, the intestine walls thicken and that prevents the normal absorption of food, thereby causing starvation of the animal.

There is no cure for Johne's disease. However, there is vaccine that can reduce the level of infection on a property over time and grazing management can reduce pasture contamination and exposure of susceptible goats.

Animals become infected primarily when young but typically only start to look unwell later in life. This means that goats can be infected and excreting bacteria, and therefore capable of infecting others, for several years yet still look healthy.

Are goats susceptible ?

Yes. In Australia, cattle, sheep, goats, deer and alpaca have been infected.

Dairy goats or other goats that are managed intensively are more at risk of infection than extensively farmed goats – not because they are more susceptible but because they are more often in conditions where they are exposed to the bacterium that causes the disease.

Around half a dozen goat herds in Tasmania are known to be infected with Johne's disease, but there are likely to be more that DPIPW is not aware of. The disease is already endemic in parts of Tasmania in sheep and cattle and can spread from these species to goats.

How is the disease spread ?

An infected goat can contaminate pasture and water with literally billions of the disease-causing bacteria, *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis* (commonly known as *Mptb* or MAP). An uninfected goat then ingests the bacterium and becomes infected. As noted above, it may be several years before that goat starts to look

unwell, but it is capable of spreading the disease in the meantime.

Young goats can be infected by fecal contamination on their mother's teats and, if the mother is in advanced stages of infection, from milk or even in the uterus. Again, it is important to understand that a doe can look healthy yet be infected (and infectious).

It is possible for goats to become infected by infected cattle or other susceptible species on the same property.

How do I know if my goats have Johne's disease?

The first sign you are likely to see is weight loss, with or without scouring, in a goat over two years old. Importantly, as the incubation period is long, the disease doesn't occur as an outbreak across the herd. Not all infected goats look unwell, so even the odd wasting goat might signify Johne's disease.

If you have a goat or goats wasting away, then inadequate feed, parasitism and Johne's disease must be considered. Even if a single animal is wasting away on your property the diagnosis of Johne's disease must be considered.

The only sure way of diagnosing, or ruling out, Johne's disease is a blood test, faeces test or an autopsy on a suspect goat.

Be careful when interpreting a negative Johne's test result - one negative test does not rule out Johne's disease in the flock and whole herd testing may be required.

With cattle, diarrhoea usually accompanies the weight loss. In goats, diarrhoea may or may not occur, so don't assume that absence of diarrhoea means that it's not Johne's disease.



What can I do to prevent Johne's in my goats ?

The most effective strategy is to minimise the risk of bringing Johne's disease onto your property in the first place. If you have a closed herd (ie you don't buy in, borrow or agist goats from other people), that provides the best form of protection.

If you buy, agist or borrow goats from someone else, you should satisfy yourself their herd is low risk of Johne's disease. ***Insist on a goat health statement from the other person.*** Such a statement is not a cast-iron guarantee against Johne's disease, but it does reduce the risk if you are provided with a statement that includes the Johne's disease risk rating (ie their ABC score – see below) for the other person's herd. ***If the other person does not provide a goat health statement, you should not take the goat.***

If you bring any other susceptible species onto your property you should also ask for a similar health statement for them too.

If you lend or agist your livestock to someone else (ie you will be taking them back at some stage), make sure you assess the Johne's risk of their property before doing so.

The national Kid Rearing Plan promotes management of kids to avoid contamination by Johne's disease bacteria from birth until maturity.

If my goats were to get Johne's disease, how would I manage that ?

Management and eradication of Johne's disease on your property requires a comprehensive plan. You should consult your vet for advice on a plan for your particular situation.

There is a vaccine available that can, over time, reduce the level of infection on your property.

The vaccine works two ways – it reduces the onset of the wasting stage of the disease and it also reduces the amount of bacteria shed onto pasture by infected animals in their faeces.

Rear kids according to the [National Kid Rearing Plan](#).

Keep your goats well fed, in good condition and maintain an effective worm control program. Goats that are robust and healthy are far more resistant to Johne's disease.

You should remove any animals that are unwell with Johne's disease, as they shed even more bacteria when they reach the wasting stage.

The disease-causing bacteria can survive on pasture for many months. Grazing management can help reduce exposure of young goats to Johne's disease :

- A pasture that has been resown is likely to have lower level of contamination
- Spell pasture for 12 months by introducing a cropping cycle,
- if handfeeding hay or pellets, do so off the ground (in troughs, racks etc)

You should advise your neighbours if you have Johne's disease on your property as they may need to take steps to reduce the risk for their properties. At the very least, you should ensure your boundary fences are stockproof and ensure that your goats are not able to contaminate any water used by ruminant livestock on neighbouring properties.

If you have Johne's disease in your goat herd, goats leaving your property should only go direct to slaughter unless you have vaccinated them and warned the receiver that your herd is infected.

Where can I get a Goat Health Statement form?

You can download a Goat Health Statement form from <https://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au/industry/goats/>

Must I report Johne's disease?

Yes, you are required by law to notify DPIPW if you suspect a case of Johne's disease in any species. This allows DPIPW to monitor Johne's disease in Tasmania and it is also important if anyone wants to export goats from Tasmania to overseas countries.

The person in charge must warn anyone who receives goats from an infected property/herd of the risk of infection. This is best done through providing a copy of the goat health statement.

Contacts

To report a suspect case of Johne's disease or for advice on a goat health statement please contact your vet or phone Biosecurity Tasmania on 1300 368 550

Key points

Goats can be infected, and be infectious, for several years before they start to look unwell. It's not sufficient that a goat looks healthy before it comes onto your property – *always get a goat health statement from the owner before allowing the goat onto your property and make sure they have an ABC score the same as or higher than your own.*

Johne's disease is a herd problem. You can't beat it by attending to just those animals that look unwell.

With Johne's disease, prevention is far, far better than trying to manage it on your property.

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