NSW GOVERNMENT Department of Primary Industries

primefact

# Enzootic bovine leucosis

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**Animal Biosecurity and Welfare, NSW DPI**

## Introduction

A national program successfully eradicated bovine leukaemia virus from the Australian dairy herd.

This Primefact provides information about the virus and the disease it causes and how to prevent your herd being infected.

## What is enzootic bovine leucosis (EBL)?

EBL is caused by bovine leukaemia virus which infects white blood cells and persists for the life of the animal. Only about 1 in 20 infected animals show any evidence of the disease.

Affected animals go off their feed and become weak and debilitated. Sometimes enlarged lymph nodes can be felt as lumps under the skin. Other signs can vary depending on what body systems are affected.

**Figure 1 Enlarged lymph node in a cow with enzootic bovine leucosis**

*image courtesy of Dairy Australia*

Disease is most commonly seen in adult beef cattle. EBL occasionally occurs in animals as young as two years of age. Other diseases with similar signs include cancers and other chronic diseases that cause weakness and weight loss in older animals.

## How is EBL spread?

The virus can be transmitted from infected cows to their unborn calves but it is usually spread between animals by tiny amounts of blood during routine activities like vaccination, castration, ear tagging, dehorning, rectal examination or natural mating.

A national program successfully eradicated bovine leukaemia virus from the Australian dairy herd. Confirmed freedom was declared in 2012.

Some beef herds in Australia may still have a low level of EBL infection and dairy farmers thinking of introducing beef bulls or other beef animals should check to ensure that they are coming from properties free of the virus or the animals have been tested and are negative.

## Confirming the diagnosis

Blood or milk is tested for the presence of specific antibodies.

## How to prevent introducing EBL to dairy herds?

Prevent EBL by:

- Only introducing cattle from non-dairy herds tested as negative for EBL

  Untested animals can be isolated (with **no opportunity for the transfer of blood)** till testing is complete.
- Sterilised implements used for procedures on beef cattle such as ear tagging, castration or disbudding.

## Notification

Suspected or confirmed EBL infection must be notified to an authorised officer. See the Primefact Notifiable pests and diseases of animals in NSW.

## General biosecurity duty

The *Biosecurity Act 2015* requires everyone to take reasonable and practical steps to prevent, eliminate or minimise the impact of biosecurity risks. This is your general biosecurity duty.

The general biosecurity duty allows flexible, risk-based decision-making in the management of biosecurity risks such as EBL.

Some examples of ways you can fulfil your general biosecurity duty include:

- implementing a property biosecurity plan
- requesting a National Health Statement when purchasing or agisting livestock
- only introducing beef breed animals that have tested negative for EBL into a dairy herd, and
- sterilizing equipment after use on beef cattle and before use on dairy cattle.

### More information

For more information contact 1800 808 095

### Acknowledgments

This Primefact includes information available from Dairy Australia (http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au)

For updates go to www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/factsheets



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