



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Wildlife and bovine TB

Information update and facts
relating to Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB)





The bacteria which causes bovine tuberculosis (bTB), *Mycobacterium bovis*, can infect many different species of mammals including wildlife. In most cases, wildlife species are infected by spillover of disease from infected cattle and they do not play a role in maintaining the disease or passing it back to cattle.

Badgers and bTB

Badgers have been shown to play an important role in spreading bTB to cattle.

In order to eradicate bTB in cattle, it is necessary to address the risk posed by bTB in badgers through:

- Removing badgers from areas where there are severe bTB outbreaks in cattle which have an epidemiological link to badgers.
- Vaccinating badgers in areas where the risk posed to cattle by infected badgers has been brought under control. Vaccinating badgers will result in fewer bTB infected badgers and fewer instances of badgers infecting other badgers or cattle.



Badgers are a protected species and the measures above are implemented by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) under strict licensing from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

By reducing the risk to cattle, these policies help farmers reduce the overall levels of bTB.

Badgers range on cattle grazing land and also visit cattle housing, feed stores and yards on some farms. Farmers can reduce the opportunities for cattle to come into direct and indirect contact with badgers by taking some biosecurity measures.

You can reduce the risk posed by badgers to your cattle. Taking action to limit interaction between cattle and badgers is a sensible way to protect the disease status of your herd. Some measures that can be undertaken include:

1. Fencing off badger setts and latrines to keep cattle away from badgers:



This set has lots of fresh grass for bedding at the entrance.



A sett with a large amount of recent excavation



These are examples of a badger latrine, commonly found in hedgerows or under bushes but also found in the middle of fields or paddocks. Badgers dig a little hole and defaecate into it.

2. Feeding cattle in raised troughs, and being careful not to spill or feed concentrates on the ground.



This example has roller-bars to make it difficult for clambering badgers.



3. Installing raised drinking troughs:



4. Raising mineral licks off the ground so that badgers cannot access them

Mineral Bucket stands are available from retailers or some farmers fabricate home-made solutions onto posts.

5. Badger-proofing farm buildings and yards;



This farmer has sheeted the bottom parts of the gates using both rubber/plastic and galvanised steel. The gap at the floor should be no more than 7.5 cm.



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Deer and TB

Deer can be infected with *Mycobacterium bovis*, and it is possible for them to pass this infection back to cattle. Research carried out on bTB in deer in Ireland had found that in certain areas such as Wicklow where there are high densities of deer, cattle and badgers living alongside each other, the same strains of bTB can circulate between them. However, in most parts of Ireland there is currently no evidence that deer play a significant role in the spread of bTB to cattle. Where significant outbreaks of bTB occur in cattle and deer are suspected of playing a role, DAFM enables farmers to understand and manage this risk by:

- Facilitating groups of local farmers and hunters to work together to reduce deer numbers
- Offering free testing of deer carcasses obtained through this approach for bTB infection

The primary responsibility for management of the deer population lies with the landowner. Where there is evidence that deer are causing damage to crops, including grass, farmers may apply to the NPWS for a section 42 license to shoot deer out of season.

Further information is available at

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/diseasecontrol/bovinetb/>