

# Texas Dairy Matters

*Higher Education Supporting the Industry*

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Ellen Jordan, Ph.D.  
Extension Dairy Specialist  
Department of Animal Science  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service  
The Texas A&M University System

## **PROTECT YOUR HERD AGAINST VESICULAR STOMATITIS**

This summer vesicular stomatitis (VS) has again been confirmed in Texas. Although it was first confirmed on May 28 in horses in South Texas, it has since been confirmed in cattle southwest of Mathis. In addition, the disease has spread northward with cases now being reported in Central Texas (Bastrop and Travis Counties).

Cattle, horses and swine can all be infected by the vesicular stomatitis. The virus can be transmitted by insects, contaminated facilities or equipment, or by animal-to-animal contact with saliva or fluids from the lesions. The typical incubation period is 3 to 5 days. The clinical signs in cattle usually include fever and lesions on the lips, gums, muzzle, nostrils, and teats. Most animals will recover in two weeks provided secondary infections don't occur.

If the disease is introduced on a dairy, it may spread rapidly throughout the herd. Dry matter intake is reduced and mastitis may result from the teat lesions. Both symptoms result in significant milk loss. Vesicular stomatitis closely resembles foot and mouth disease (FMD), a foreign animal disease. Facilities with VS are placed under quarantine.

To protect your herd against VS, implement stringent biosecurity measures immediately if you don't already have them in place. The cost for implementing biosecurity changes in general is very low. Frequently it requires only a change in management and commitment to those changes. Seldom are large capital investments required, but everyone working on the farm must be involved. Biosecurity includes the management practices that:

- Protect the herd from disease entry
- Minimize the spread or adverse effects of existing diseases, and
- Reduce the risk for illegal residues of antibiotics in milk and meat.

The key elements of a biosecurity plan targeted at VS include:

1. Taking control of how diseases enter and spread in a herd, which requires managing cattle, manure, pests, pets, wildlife, people, water and feed.
2. When purchasing replacements making sure the replacements originate from an area that doesn't have VS. Ask the seller to provide a health history of the farm and the animals you are purchasing.
3. Isolating new purchases or returning animals upon arrival at the farm.
4. Transporting purchases in clean trucks, while minimizing the stress of transportation. If at all possible use your own equipment to haul animals.
5. If you take animals to a show or event
  - Do not comingle your livestock with those of unknown origin.
  - Do not water livestock out of a community water trough or with a community hose.
  - Do not share equipment at a show without washing and disinfecting it.
  - Thoroughly clean your hands and all equipment between animals.
  - Ask people not to pet your animals to protect the health of your animals.
6. Implementing a good insect control program.
7. Managing manure to prevent contamination of facilities, young stock and feed.

Preventing feed from becoming contaminated with disease pathogens or manure is critical to the success of any biosecurity program. Keep rodents and birds out of feed storage areas. Clean delivery trucks between trips and limit the access of drivers to other areas of the facilities. Control the access of pets and pests to minimize wastage and contamination of the feed. Use separate equipment for manure handling. Balance rations to enhance productivity and immune function to reduce metabolic and infectious diseases. Visually assess whether feeds have mold and conduct routine testing for high risk toxins.

Other precautionary steps required include:

- Monitor where people go and insist they clean and sanitize boots and equipment.
- Work livestock from youngest to oldest and healthy to sick.
- Develop an effective vaccination program to supplement your other biosecurity measures.

Most of these practices can help your herd lead a healthier life, which minimizes the economic losses that occur when animals have to be treated for disease. Implement a sound biosecurity program to protect your herd against VS and other diseases.