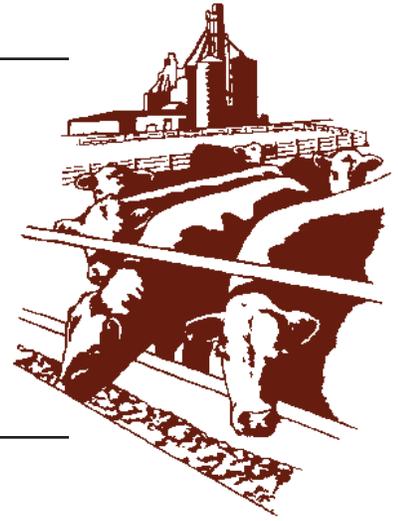


Beef Cattle Handbook



BCH-3120

Product of Extension Beef Cattle Resource Committee
Adapted from the Cattle Producer's Library

Infectious Abortions in Cattle

Guy E. Reynolds, Oregon State University¹

Infertility and abortions in cattle are two of the greatest problems the cattle breeder faces. The causes are complex and difficult to identify. This publication suggests and briefly outlines some of the more common diseases and control measures.

In cases of abortions, call your veterinarian immediately, and have the following information and/or material available:

1. Identify aborting cows and isolate them from the rest of the herd. This helps prevent spread of infection and makes them available for examination.
2. Save fetuses and fresh placentas. Refrigerate at 38o F to 45o F. Do not freeze. Wrap in plastic or other waterproof material. Do not cut or wash the fetus or placenta.
3. Have a good history of your herd vaccinations, movement of cattle to and from other premises, and management and origin of bulls.
4. Keep good records of the reproductive history of cows, including number of abortions, conception rate, and approximate breeding dates.

The following is a rough guide to help you determine the age of an aborted fetus:

Length of gestation	Description of fetus
2 months	Size of a mouse
3 months	Size of a rat
4 months	Size of a small cat
5 months	Size of a large cat
6 months	Size of a small dog (hair around eyes, tail, muzzle)
7 months	Fine hair on body and legs
8 months	Hair coat complete, incisor teeth slightly erupted
9 months	Incisor teeth erupted

Diseases Causing Abortions in Cattle

Disease	Organism	How spread	Stage of gestation at abortion	Samples needed for diagnosis	Vaccination	Remarks
Leptospirosis	Bacterial (Leptospira— at least five serotypes)	Urine of infected animals; contaminated water; aborted feti	Any stage, usually 6 to 9 months	Fetus; placenta blood samples from aborting cows and others in the herd	Killed vaccine gives immunity for 6 months	Laboratory should determine the type of leptospira causing infection.
Brucellosis	Bacterial (Brucella abortus)	Aborted feti; uterine discharges and placenta; infected premises	6 to 9 months	Fetus; placenta; blood sample	Live vaccine in heifers	Infected animals are culled. Do not vaccinate bulls.
Foothill abortion (EBA)	Unknown	Unknown (suspect wild animal reservoir)	6 to 9 months	Fetus; blood sample; placenta	None	Abortng animals usually immune and should be retained in herd.
Red-Nose (IBR)	Viral	Infections from cow to cow	6 to 9 months	Fetus; placenta blood samples	MLV or killed vaccin	Use intranasal or killed vaccine on pregnant cows. Abortions may or may not be associated with illness in cow.
Bovine Virus Diarrhea (BVD)	Viral	Contagious from cow to cow	Variable, usually early	Two blood samples, 3 weeks apart; fetus	MLV or killed vaccin, vaccinate after 8 months old.	Calves born with disease may show hair loss and brain damage.
Trichomoniasis	Protozoal	Venereal disease spread by infected bulls	2 to 4 months	Preputial scraping from infected bulls; uterus from cull cow	Killed vaccine	Cull infected bulls and open cows, sexual rest of bulls for 60 to 90 days, artificial insemination.

Diseases Causing Abortions in Cattle (continued)

Disease	Organism	How spread	Stage of gestation at abortion	Samples needed for diagnosis	Vaccination	Remarks
Listeriosis	Bacterial	Carried by rodents and other animals; moldy roughage	Variable	Fetus; placenta; blood from cow	None	Uterine infection; illness in cattle (circling disease)
Campylobacteriosis (Vibriosis)	Bacterial (C. fetus venerealis)	Venereal disease spread by infected bulls	Early abortion	Vaginal mucus from infected cow; cervical mucus tampons; fetus; preputial washing from bull	Killed vaccine follow directions	Appears as infertility; high % open cows. Bulls serve as carriers. Also causes abortions.
	(C. fetus intestinalis)	Ingested		+/- 6 months	Fetus	None Sporadic abortions
Chlamydial abortion	Chlamydia psittassi	Unknown, suspect oral and venereal	Variable	Fetus; placenta	None	Sporadic abortions
Mycotic abortion	Fungal Aspergillus and other species.	Ingested	6 to 9 months	Fetus; placenta	None	Reported to cause 3 to 10 percent of bovine abortions.

Adapted from CATTLE PRODUCER'S LIBRARY CL681

- 1 Revised and updated by Stuart D. Lincoln,
Department of Veterinary Science, Caine Veterinary
Teaching and Research Center, Caldwell, University
of Idaho.

Author:

Guy E. Reynolds, Oregon State University

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