



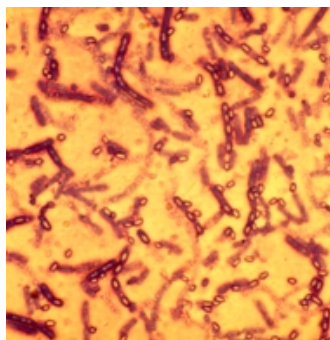
27 April 2010

### Anthrax reminder

Thanks to modern medicine, anthrax in sheep and cattle has almost been relegated to a footnote in Australian veterinary history. Nevertheless, there are still cases every year in the southern states.

Graziers in the 'anthrax belt' (an area through the centre of NSW and into Victoria where anthrax is known to occur) are urged to be aware of this unpredictable disease if unexplained cattle or sheep death is encountered this autumn.

Although this is a disease often shrouded in silence, it's essential that farmers know that it's manageable and use correct biosecurity measures for reducing the risk of disease.



Anthrax is a reportable disease in all states and a vet, animal health authority or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline (1800 675 888) must be called if a case is suspected.

Dan Salmon, veterinarian with the NSW Riverina Livestock Health and Pest Authority (LHPA), believes anthrax is a disease that needs to be demystified.

"Anthrax should be treated with respect but not fear," he said.

"People are often too scared to say anything thinking that markets will close down or they'll be ostracised. In fact it is a very manageable disease with an effective vaccine, but, if ignored it has the potential to kill stock."

"I often speak to farmers who have discovered a dead sheep or two, and having not followed up the deaths, they think in retrospect it could have been anthrax. We generally see a few cases every year in this area, usually in the warmer months."

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Simple biosecurity measures can be taken to reduce the risk of anthrax spread:

- inspect stock regularly for sudden deaths or unusual behaviour
- maintain boundary fences to keep stock contained and away from neighbouring stock and wild animals and pests
- deter wild animals and pests that could carry the bacteria.

While anthrax is relatively rare, it lurks just below the surface in many parts of southern Australia and has potential to cause real problems if farmers don't recognise it or don't say anything. Spores can remain viable for decades under the surface of the soil.



From a farm biosecurity perspective, it is important to keep the risk factors in- mind, especially in the warmer months:

- know where anthrax is reasonably common
- investigate every sudden unexplained death of sheep and cattle with a vet
- think about vaccination
- earth works or disturbance to the soil can increase risks.
- anthrax is not passed from live animal to animal, but from spores in the ground or the carcass of an animal that has died, even up to decades later

There are some signs farmers can look for in unusual deaths:

- In sheep and cattle, death is sudden and there can be blood stained discharges at external orifices.
- Horses usually die suddenly with oedema (abnormal pooling of fluids or blood) in the chest, abdomen and limbs; some horses may survive for days, with colic and oedema.
- Pigs are usually visibly ill with high fever, dullness, anorexia, swelling of the neck and face and occasionally blood stained froth at the mouth.

“It is very important to report any unexplained deaths to your local vet, DPI or LHPA. If you live in a high risk area, think about vaccinating and keep your eyes open for sudden, unexplained deaths, even if it is only one. The vaccine is very effective, but it may not be practical to vaccinate every year for such a rare and sporadic disease.” Dr Salmon said.

If you suspect a case of anthrax:

- do not handle, open, skin or move the carcass

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- prevent other animals from disturbing the carcass to avoid spread of infection – including cats, dogs, feral animals and birds.
- move and isolate other animals from the paddock or fence off the carcass.
- follow all directions from your LHPA or DPI veterinarian.
- halt all stock movements from the property
- There is also a risk to human health through exposure to affected animals and additional care should be taken when handling stock.

Photo captions:

1) Microscope picture of spores and vegetative cells of anthrax of the bacterium *Bacillus anthracis* (World Health Organisation).

2) Hereford cows and calves

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