TBfree

TB INFORMATION FOR HUNTERS

How to identify bovine TB in animals during a hunt; how to safely dispose of carcasses; the risks of illegally releasing animals.

WHAT IS BOVINE TB?

Bovine TB is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium Mycobacterium bovis. It infects the lymph nodes in the head and body, as well as lungs, liver and other organs (offal). All mammals can potentially contract TB. Controlling bovine TB prevents livestock production losses in cattle and deer, and protects the world-leading reputation of New Zealand's dairy, beef and deer products. The main carriers of TB are possums, ferrets, stoats, pigs and deer.

OSPRI aims to eradicate TB from New Zealand by 2055. To do this we need to ensure that there are no new TB outbreaks in areas cleared of TB. Hunters play a vital role in this, by ensuring that the remains of potentially TB infected animals are disposed of correctly, and live animals are not relocated.

TB can be seen in lymph nodes below the jawbone of a wild pig.

What does TB look like?

A TB lesion can look like a yellow-green pus-filled abscess in body tissues or grape-like lesions on the lining of the chest or abdominal cavity. In pigs, TB is usually found in the head.

HOW DOES TB SPREAD?

TB is spread through contact with respiratory fluids. It can be contracted by inhalation following close contact with an infected animal, or scavenging the carcass, head or offal of an infected animal.

TB bacteria can be found in a number of sites in infected animals and if the lungs are involved then an animal's breath can be infectious. This is how TB is spread through social groups of both domestic and wild animals. Cattle and deer are naturally curious and will sniff possums which stray into fenced farmland.

Scavengers such as possums, ferrets, stoats or pigs feeding on an infected carcass or offal may contract TB. A grossly infected animal may have externally exposed weeping lesions which can be infectious. In wild pigs TB is found 95% of the time in lymph nodes just below the jaw – this is why dumping pig heads where scavenging animals may have access is such an issue for OSPRI's TBfree programme.

SAFE DISPOSAL

Disposing of offal away from the capture site is a very risky practice as it may spread TB to uninfected areas. If the animal is gutted at the capture site, we encourage you to bury the offal. If this is not possible, leave the offal in the immediate area. If the animal is removed whole, ensure all waste is disposed of where it cannot be accessed by scavengers – ideally burned or buried.

Burned

Buried

WILD ANIMAL RELEASES ARE ILLEGAL

It is illegal to release any wild animal. One of the potential consequences of releasing wild animals is the spread of TB. This can establish the disease in possum populations and may then be passed on to farmed cattle and deer. If TB is found in an area where possums were previously free of bovine TB, control operations will be undertaken.

USING PIGS TO FIGHT TB

Pig populations are not controlled as part of OSPRI's TBfree programme, however pigs are used to help prove the presence or absence of TB in a given area. Pigs are good indicators of TB in possums because they scavenge and are likely to become infected after eating a TB-infected possum carcass. Pigs can't maintain TB within their own population, so if they show infection it has come from another species. In some areas, contracted hunters supply OSPRI with pig heads for autopsy to check for the presence or absence of TB.

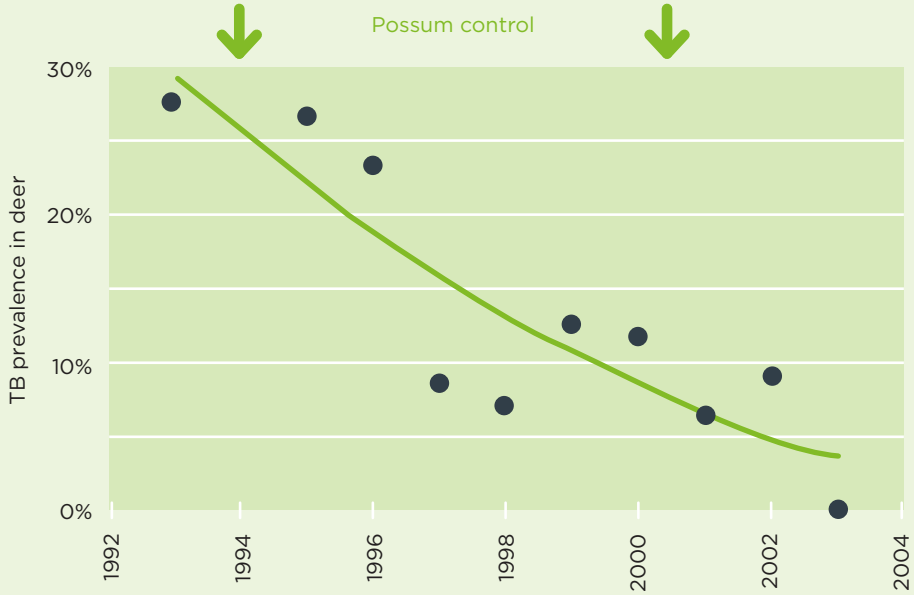
Sentinel pig operations are another research method used to confirm the presence or absence of TB in a specified area. This involves releasing tracked TB-free pigs to be picked up at a later date to see whether they have picked up TB in the area.

HOW TB IMPACTS DEER

Deer can carry TB infection for up to 15 years, unlike possums which mostly die within 6 months of becoming infected. The disease is underlying until their immune system is no longer able to fight the infection, usually through age or bad health, and they die of TB.

This makes it possible for TB to be eradicated from a local possum population within as few as five years of possum control being started, but TB infection can live on in deer for another decade. The problem is that if possum control is stopped after five to ten years, possum numbers can increase back to the levels at which TB can persist before the last infected deer dies. This creates a risk that TB can re-establish in possum populations. As a consequence, possum control has to be maintained for at least a decade in areas where significant numbers of infected deer were once present.

TB PREVALENCE IN DEER DECLINES AFTER POSSUM CONTROL
EASTERN HAUHUNGAROA RANGE



FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information visit ospri.co.nz.

If you have questions call OSPRI on

0800 482 463

This information was developed in partnership with Landcare Research.

Landcare Research
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