

TUBERCULOSIS

SPECIES AFFECTED

Cattle and other wild and domestic species

DESCRIPTION

Bovine tuberculosis (TB) is a chronic disease of animals caused by a bacterium called *Mycobacterium bovis* (*M. bovis*), which is closely related to the bacteria that cause human and avian tuberculosis. This disease can affect practically all mammals, causing a general state of illness, coughing and eventual death.

The name tuberculosis comes from the nodules, called 'tubercles', which form in the lymph nodes of affected animals.

Until the 1920s when control measures began in developed countries, tuberculosis was one of the major diseases of domestic animals throughout the world. Today, TB remains an important disease of cattle, wild animals, and is a significant zoonosis (a disease of animals which can also infect humans).

The usual route of infection is by inhaling infected droplets, which are expelled from the lungs by coughing. Ingesting unpasteurized milk from infected cows can also infect calves and humans.

Because the course of disease is slow, taking months or years to kill an infected animal, an animal can spread the disease to many other herd mates before it begins to manifest clinical signs. Therefore, movement of undetected infected domestic animals and contact with infected wild animals are the major ways of spreading the disease.