



# NEWS

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**Seasonal reminders:**

- Do not let cattle graze country with significant amounts of heliotrope. Heliotrope damages the liver and cattle can be affected months and even years later.
- Watch out for heat stress in early autumn calving cows. Cows with milk fever are unable to regulate their temperature and will overheat on a hot day. Throw buckets of water on these cows to help them cool down.



- Calves born in hot weather are especially susceptible to dehydration. Sick or scouring calves need extra attention in hot weather.
- Spring calving herd pregnancy testing is well underway – don't forget to book your herd in. The ideal time to get the herd pregnancy tested is when the cows are 6 to 16 weeks in calf.

**BVDV: Don't Let It Go Undetected!**

We've seen a rise in BVDV (Pestivirus) issues in dairy herds recently, leading to reproductive losses and calf losses (weak and dummy calves).

For the milking herd annual or, ideally, twice a year bulk milk antibody testing is a simple and cost-effective way to monitor herd exposure.

For heifers, antibody blood testing at least 10 – 12 heifers in the group prior to joining to assess BVDV exposure is advised. The level of exposure will determine if the heifer group need vaccinating (none or limited exposure), need ear notching (PI maybe within the group) or no vaccination is needed as the heifers have been previously exposed to the virus.

Depending on your farms level of exposure to the virus, we can work with you to tailor an BVDV control program for your farm.

**Japanese Encephalitis Virus (JEV)**

JEV, a mosquito-borne virus, has been detected in Victoria and can affect both animals and humans.

While cattle typically show no signs, infections can impact reproductive performance. The greatest risk is for people working with livestock, so personal protection is essential.

✓ *How is JEV spread?* Mosquito bites, particularly in wet seasons and warmer months.

✓ *Risks to dairy herds?* While cattle are 'dead-end hosts,' the virus has been found in dairy herds and biosecurity measures should be in place.

✓ *Human risk?* Dairy workers and those near waterways should take precautions (repellents, protective clothing, vaccination if at risk).

✓ *What can you do?* Reduce mosquito breeding sites (stagnant water), use insect control and monitor herd health.



## Q Fever – A Rising Risk for Dairy Farmers & Herds

Q Fever cases are increasing in Victoria, posing a serious health risk to farmers, dairy workers and livestock handlers. The disease is caused by the *Coxiella burnetii* bacteria, which spreads through dust, birth fluids, manure, urine and milk from infected animals. Cattle often show no obvious signs but can still shed the bacteria, creating a long-term risk for both humans and the herd.

### Effects on Cattle



- ✓ Subclinical Infection – Most cattle show no visible illness but may still carry and spread the bacteria.
- ✓ Reproductive Issues – In some cases, Q Fever has been linked to abortions, stillbirths and infertility.
- ✓ Ongoing Shedding – Infected cows may shed bacteria in milk, birth fluids and manure for months, increasing farm contamination risks.

### Effects on Humans – More Than Just "Flu-Like"

Q Fever can cause severe illness in humans, often mistaken for the flu, but it can lead to serious long-term complications.

- ✓ Acute Symptoms:
  - High fever, chills, profuse sweating
  - Severe headache and muscle aches
  - Pneumonia or hepatitis (liver inflammation)
  - Extreme fatigue, which may last weeks or months
- ✓ Chronic Q Fever (1–5% of cases):
  - Heart complications (endocarditis, potentially fatal)
  - Chronic fatigue syndrome, lasting months or years
  - Joint pain & inflammation
- ✓ At-Risk Groups:
  - Dairy farmers, stock handlers, veterinarians, abattoir workers
  - Pregnant women (risk of miscarriage or birth complications)
  - People with heart conditions or weakened immune systems

### Testing & Prevention

- ✓ Herd Testing:
  - Bulk milk PCR testing – Detects Q Fever bacteria shedding in the herd.
  - Blood testing – Confirms exposure in individual animals.
- ✓ Protecting Humans:

**Vaccination** – The most effective protection for high-risk workers. Screening is required before vaccination. It is recommended all at risk personnel should be vaccinated against Q fever. Vets are required to be vaccinated against Q fever during their Veterinary Degree.

**Hygiene & PPE** – Use masks, gloves, and protective clothing when handling birth materials or working in dusty environments.

**Dust Control** – Keep yards and calving areas well-maintained to reduce airborne spread.

## Avian Influenza Risk to Northern Victorian Dairy Cattle

Avian Influenza (AI), particularly the H5N1 strain, has traditionally been associated with birds. However, recent cases overseas have raised concerns about its presence in dairy cattle and its potential risks to livestock and human health.

Current Situation in Poultry and Humans in Victoria

**Poultry:** In February 2025, a new outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza H7N8 was confirmed at a poultry farm in Euroa, northern Victoria. This marks the fourth detection of the H7N8 strain in the region, affecting an egg farm with approximately 90,000 chickens. The property has been quarantined, and response measures are underway to contain the outbreak.

In May and June 2024, outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza H7 were detected in poultry across Victoria, New South Wales, and the Australian Capital Territory. These outbreaks have since been eradicated.

**Humans:** In May 2024, Victoria reported its first human case of avian influenza A(H5N1). The infection was identified in a child who had recently returned from overseas travel, marking the first recorded human case of H5N1 in Australia. Since the May 2024 case, there have been no new reported human cases of H5N1 in Victoria.

### H5N1 and Dairy Cattle: Global Concerns

**United States Cases:** In 2024, H5N1 was detected in dairy cattle across multiple U.S. states. Infected cows exhibited symptoms such as reduced appetite, decreased milk production, and changes in milk appearance. While infection rates within herds were low, these cases highlighted the virus's ability to cross species barriers.

The exact transmission route remains under investigation, but potential pathways include environmental contamination from infected wild birds or indirect transmission via contaminated equipment. The virus was found to persist on milking equipment, suggesting a possible mechanism for cow-to-cow transmission.

### Implications for Northern Victorian Dairy Cattle

**Current Status:** As of now, Australia, including Northern Victoria, remains free from the H5N1 strain affecting cattle. However, with AI outbreaks in poultry, ongoing vigilance is required.

### Biosecurity Measures:

**Monitoring and Surveillance:** Regular health checks and prompt reporting of unusual symptoms in livestock.

**Wildlife Management:** Implementing measures to deter wild birds from accessing feed and water sources intended for cattle.

**Equipment Hygiene:** Ensuring thorough cleaning and disinfection of equipment, especially milking apparatus, to prevent contamination.

### Human Health Considerations

**Transmission Risk:** While human infections with H5N1 are rare, individuals in close contact with infected animals, such as poultry or potentially cattle, may be at risk.

**Preventive Actions:** Farm workers should adopt protective measures, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and adherence to hygiene protocols, to mitigate potential transmission risks.

### Key Takeaways:

- ✓ The recent poultry outbreaks in Victoria involve the H7N8 strain, not H5N1.
- ✓ The single human H5N1 case in Victoria was travel-related, with no evidence of local transmission.
- ✓ While H5N1 has been detected in dairy cattle overseas, there is currently no evidence of its presence in Australian cattle.
- ✓ Ongoing biosecurity measures are crucial to safeguarding both livestock and human health.
- ✓ Given the dynamic nature of avian influenza viruses, dairy farmers in Northern Victoria should remain vigilant and uphold robust biosecurity practices to mitigate risks.