Johne’s Disease in Goats

Johne’s is a disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis* avium, a similar pathogen to that causing TB.

What does it look like?

Animals may be infected early in life but don’t show signs until they are older. The bacteria targets the small intestine, causing thickening which reduces absorption of nutrients across the gut wall. This results in weight loss and poor performance, but unlike cows, scour is not typically seen in goats until much later in the disease process, if at all. Because the signs are nonspecific, diagnosis may involve ruling out other causes of illness, for example worms and fluke.

How do I know if my goats have Johne’s?

Diagnosis of Johne’s is complicated by the presence of animals which are infected but not yet showing signs of the disease. These animals will not have responded to the infection and produced antibodies to fight the bacteria yet. Therefore the test, which detects raised antibodies in blood, will be unreliable. Although testing animals is very important in diagnosis, animals that do have the disease may still test negative for Johne’s. Other tests can be performed on clinically affected animals, such as faecal sampling and post mortem examination.

How is it spread?

Goats can be infected by Johne’s from faecal contamination of the environment, feed or water. Small volumes of faeces can contain large number of mycobacteria, making this the most likely method spread. Infection can pass during pregnancy from the doe to her kids via the placenta or through colostrum and milk after birth. Animals that are infected but not showing obvious signs of the disease may be allowed to breed and spread the disease without being noticed. This can result in high levels of infection on individual farms.

How do I prevent the spread of Johne’s?

- Find out the status of your herd, blood testing of adults can be a good idea to see if Johne’s is present
- Maintain a closed herd. If you do need to purchase animals, they can be tested for evidence of Johne’s disease, but more importantly find out what the herd’s disease status is
- Ensure that kids get enough colostrum, but avoid pooling colostrum from others to feed
- Keep kidding area clean with deep fresh bedding, and frequent thorough cleaning and disinfection
- Raise water/feed troughs to prevent faecal contamination
- Disinfect contaminated equipment and the environment if infection has been identified
- Test and remove infected animals from herd.

Get in touch

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