

Moloka'i Bovine Tuberculosis and Meat Safety



1. What is bovine TB and what's going on Moloka'i?

Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) is a contagious chronic disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium bovis*. Bovine TB typically affects cattle, but other warm-blooded animals can also get infected including humans.

2. Summary of the 2021-2022 bovine TB outbreak Moloka'i

In 2021, an outbreak of bTB occurred in a Central Moloka'i cattle herd. Since then, four other cattle herds and one mixed herd of domestic swine and cattle have been infected. Three of the herds have been completely depopulated and three others are in the process of depopulation. Testing of cattle and goat herds are continuing on Moloka'i. The plan is to test the entire island's cattle and domestic goat herds.

3. Moloka'i Island Quarantine

A quarantine has been placed on all ungulates except horses on the entire island of Moloka'i to prevent the spread of bTB. The quarantine is in place to prevent the spread of bTB by prohibiting the unrestricted movement of ungulates without the prior approval of the State Veterinarian.

4. What other ungulates besides cattle and domestic swine are involved?

Historically, feral swine, axis deer and mongoose were found to be infected with bTB on Moloka'i. Wildlife surveillance is now underway to determine if wildlife species may be involved with this outbreak and what the infection prevalence might be if they are. So far one axis deer from the West End of Moloka'i submitted by a hunter has been found infected.

5. What is the expected infection rate in wildlife?

Historically, infection rates in axis deer, feral pigs and mongoose on Moloka'i have been very low. However, worldwide, various species of wildlife have been shown to serve as reservoirs for bTB, which can result in the resurgence of infections in cattle herds that have been cleared of infection.

6. Is meat from livestock and wildlife on Moloka'i safe to eat?

There are two official slaughter plants on Moloka'i that are regulated by the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. All meat products (beef, pork, venison) harvested at these plants receive ante-mortem (before death) and post-mortem (after death) inspection to ensure wholesomeness and determine it's safe for human consumption. Any live animal or carcass of an animal that have any lesions consistent with bTB is condemned and buried for disposal.

7. Who regulates meat harvested for pet food?

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) regulate meat harvested for pet food. However, the individual inspection of live animals and carcasses harvested for pet food does not occur unless there is a complaint over a product.

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8. What procedures are in place for carcasses used for pet food?

As a result of the 2021-2022 bTB outbreak, State livestock inspectors and wildlife technicians are working with hunters, wildlife harvesting licensees and pet food processors to conduct bTB sampling on hunted wildlife. If carcasses with evidence of bTB gross lesions are detected, the carcass would be held pending laboratory diagnostics or disposed of by burial if lesions are severe. Tissues collected by the inspectors and technicians will be sent to the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory for confirmation.

9. What should hunters be aware of about bTB and game meat?

The Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA), Animal Industry Division and Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), Division of Forestry and Wildlife have posted information on their websites educating hunters to what bTB looks like in wildlife if they are infected. If hunters detect unhealthy animals or abnormal findings when dressing their game, they should not consume meat from that animal. HDOA livestock inspectors and DLNR wildlife technicians can be contacted and they will submit tissues to the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory for diagnostic testing of any carcasses with abnormal findings.

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