



# Johne's disease in goats

**Johne's disease is a serious wasting disease of goats, which can lead to loss of production and death.**

## What is Johne's disease (JD)?

It is a serious disease that causes wasting in animals. The intestine walls thicken, preventing the normal absorption of food, thereby causing the animal to utilise its fat and muscle reserves leading to starvation of the animal. Goats are susceptible to both the cattle and sheep strains of the disease.

There is no cure for JD, however, with active management and culling, it is possible to reduce the impact and in some cases even eradicate the disease. Animals become infected primarily when young, but often start to look unwell later in life. Infected goats can appear healthy whilst continuing to excrete bacteria and contaminate pasture.

## How is the disease spread?

An infected goat can contaminate pasture and water with literally billions of the disease-causing bacteria, *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis*, via its faeces.

Young goats can be infected by ingesting faecal contamination on the teats of their mother or other goats. If the mother is in advanced stages of infection, the kid can also be infected from drinking her milk or less often a kid can become infected before birth.

Goats also become infected by grazing land used by other JD-infected species such as cattle and sheep.

## How do I know if my goats have Johne's disease?

Often, the first sign of JD is weight loss, with or without scouring, in mature goats. A single wasting goat on your property should be investigated as it might signify JD.

The only sure way of diagnosing, or ruling out JD is through testing, or a necropsy on a suspect goat. This should be arranged through your veterinarian. However, an individual negative blood test does not rule out JD in an animal and your veterinarian may request a whole herd test.

## What can I do to prevent Johne's disease in my goats?

The most effective strategy is to minimise the risk of bringing JD onto your property in the first place. Maintaining a strictly 'closed herd' provides the best form of protection.

If producers buy, agist or borrow goats from other properties, they should be satisfied that the herd carries a low risk of JD. **Insist on a Goat Health Statement (GHS) from the seller.** Buying from a herd with a high assurance rating is one of the best preventative measures you can take.

If the seller does not provide a GHS with the same or higher assurance rating as your own property, you should not take the animals.

If you bring any other JD susceptible species onto your property you should also ask for a similar health statement for them and check their Johne's disease status as well. Ask your veterinarian for advice if you are uncertain how to interpret statuses or assurance rating of other species.

If you lend or agist your livestock and intend for those animals to return to your property, make sure you assess the JD risk of the property where they are going before doing so.

The National Kid Rearing Plan promotes hygienic management of the kids to avoid contamination by Johne's disease bacteria from birth until maturity. →



[www.gica.com.au](http://www.gica.com.au)

[www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au](http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au)



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If practiced, in conjunction with the use of a vaccine (Gudair®), goat owners can reduce the level of infection on a property over time. Grazing management can further reduce pasture contamination and the exposure of susceptible goats to the bacterium.

## If my goats were to get Johne's disease, how would I manage that?

Producers should consult a veterinarian for advice on developing a comprehensive plan. Using the vaccine, Gudair®, can help reduce the level of infection on an infected property. The vaccine works in two ways by delaying the onset of the wasting stage of the disease and reducing the amount of bacteria shed onto pasture.

Rear kids according to the National Kid Rearing Plan.  
[www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/national/kid/rearing/plan](http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/national/kid/rearing/plan)

Remove and isolate any test-positive animals before they can shed more bacteria onto pastures.

Always keep goats well fed, in good condition and maintain an effective worm and animal disease control program.

JD bacteria can survive on shaded pasture for at least seven months. Grazing management can help reduce exposure of young goats to JD.

Grazing or feeding measures to avoid Johne's disease include:

- grazing on pasture that has been resown on prepared soil (other than direct drilling) as it is likely to have a lower level of contamination
- handfeeding hay or pellets off the ground (in troughs, racks etc)
- spell pasture for 12 months by introducing a cropping cycle if possible.



Producers with JD-infected animals should inform their neighbours and ensure boundary fences are stock-proof and the infected stock are not able to contaminate any water used by ruminant livestock on neighbouring properties, including run-off.

Goats infected with Johne's disease should only go direct to slaughter. If selling or agisting Gudair® vaccinated goats, the intended recipient of the animals should be informed of the properties JD status and provided with a fully completed GHS.

## Where can I get a Goat Health Statement form?

You can download a GHS form from  
[www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au)

## Biosecurity is vital

Remember, Johne's disease is spread with animal movements. Follow these important on-farm biosecurity steps, secure your fences and always ask for a National Goat Health Statement when agisting or purchasing stock to ensure Johne's disease is not imported into your herd from outside sources. For more biosecurity information visit:

[www.farmbiosecurity.com.au](http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au)



[www.gica.com.au](http://www.gica.com.au)  
[www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au](http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au)

*This fact sheet has been developed by Animal Health Australia and the Goat Industry Council of Australia on behalf of the national goat industry and the state departments of primary industries.*