



Keeping an eye out for Theileria

Kansas State University beef cattle experts are urging producers to stay alert this winter as new research reveals that Theileria, a tick-borne parasite affecting cattle across the region, may be spreading in more ways than once believed. In a recent episode of the [Beef Cattle Institute's Cattle Chat podcast](#), veterinary entomologist Cassandra Olds explained how shifting transmission patterns and overlooked management habits could leave herds more vulnerable than expected — and what producers can do now to stay ahead of the disease. “Theileria is tick-borne but can also be spread by sucking lice, possibly stable flies, limited placental transmission and contaminated needles or equipment,” Olds said. “This emphasizes the importance of single-needle use and highlights how difficult vector control can be.” Olds stressed that while ticks remain the primary concern, secondary vectors and poor hygiene during routine herd management procedures significantly increase risk. “Producers need to be aware — it's not just about ticks anymore,” she said.

Experts recommend that producers take the following steps to reduce transmission risk:

- Implement strict, single-use needle protocols during vaccinations, treatments and pregnancy checks.
- Clean and disinfect equipment such as dehorners, taggers, and castration tools - between animals.
- Evaluate external parasite control plans to ensure they include lice management during winter.
- Monitor incoming cattle, especially replacements, for signs of anemia or weakness, which may indicate Theileria infection.
- Consult with a local veterinarian to create a diagnostic and response plan if unexplained cases of anemia occur.

By Chevy-Lynn Vaske, K-State Extension news service

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Dr. Anthony Tarpoff, DVM Kansas State University

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