

# Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) Fact Sheet July 2005

Prepared by the Office of the Chief Medical Health Officer

Background:

**A recent autopsy of a young bull in the Hook Lake Wood Bison Recovery Project showed that it was infected with bovine tuberculosis.**

What is Bovine TB?

- **Bovine Tuberculosis (Bovine TB) is an infectious disease caused by a germ called Mycobacterium bovis (M.bovis bacteria).**
- **It can affect cattle, bison, deer, elk and other species.**
- **Bovine TB is a chronic disease that rarely shows symptoms until it reaches an advanced stage. The disease can lie dormant in an animal for many years.**
- **In advanced stages of TB in a live animal, the main symptom is gradual loss of weight despite adequate nutrition. Other symptoms may be low-grade fever, enlarged lymph nodes (i.e. in the neck), and difficulty breathing. If the lungs are affected, a hacking cough may be present**

What is the human risk of Bovine TB from this infected calf?

- **This case poses NO health risk to the community. The animal did not show signs of active TB. This was an incidental finding after the animal was culled for population control. Meat from the animal was not eaten. There was no infection in the lungs. There was no chance of spread in the water or the manure.**

Can humans contract Bovine TB from eating the meat of an infected animal?

- **It is unlikely a person skinning/gutting or eating meat of an animal infected with Bovine TB could become infected.**
- **Hunters should take sanitary precautions, including washing after skinning/gutting an animal.**
- **The local Renewable Resource Office, or Environmental Health Officer should be advised when a suspected infected animal is harvested.**

Who is at risk?

- **Those at greatest risk are the handlers of the infected animal.**

- **While it's possible for Bovine TB to be transmitted to humans, the likelihood of it happening is remote.**
- **There have been no recorded laboratory-confirmed cases of humans infected with M.bovis in the Northwest Territories.**

How is it transmitted?

- **Bovine TB is not a highly contagious disease for humans. Spread of this disease usually requires frequent and extended exposure.**
- **The greatest risk of spread is through respiration (breathing). Invisible droplets (aerosols) containing TB bacteria may be exhaled or coughed out by infected animals and then inhaled by other animals.**
- **Animals and humans can also get Bovine TB from drinking unpasteurized milk or consuming raw undercooked meat from an infected animal.**

How is it treated?

- **The only successful method to remove Bovine TB is to destroy all infected and exposed animals.**
- **Anyone exposed to TB-infected animals can be tested by mean of a skin test. Bovine TB in humans is treatable with antibiotics.**

How can it be prevented?

- **There is no preventative treatment to protect animals from becoming infected with TB.**
- **Bovine TB bacteria in milk is destroyed by pasteurization.**
- **Adequate cooking destroys bacteria in infected meat.**