



Directorate Animal Health, Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development Private Bag X138, Pretoria 0001
Enquiries: Dr Mpho Maja • Tel: +27 12 319 7456 • Fax: +27 12 319 7218 • E-mail: PA.DAH@dalrrd.gov.za Website:
www.dalrrd.gov.za
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To: Provincial Veterinary Services
National Animal Health Forum
Private Veterinarians (care of South African Veterinary Council)

CONFIRMATION OF THEILERIOSIS OUTBREAKS IN ZIMBABWE – PERSPECTIVE ON POTENTIAL RISK TO SOUTH AFRICA AND PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES INDICATED

No outbreaks of East Coast Fever or January Disease, caused by cattle-adapted strains of *Theileria parva*, have occurred in South Africa since the early 1950s and South Africa remains free of these diseases.

The Zimbabwe Veterinary Services have confirmed outbreaks of Theileriosis caused mainly by the cattle adapted *Theileria parva* (January disease) across the country. This letter serves as early warning of the potential threat that this poses to South Africa, and the measures required to mitigate this risk.

Theileriosis in cattle may be associated with very high mortalities, especially if an outbreak occurs in previously unexposed animals. The disease is transmitted by brown ear ticks (*Rhipicephalus appendiculatus*). All types of *Theileria parva* are controlled diseases in South Africa and any suspicion of the disease must be reported to the state veterinarian as soon as possible for further investigation and sample submission.

Due to the breeding cycle of the brown ear tick in the affected areas, the higher rainfall summer months pose the highest risk for disease transmission, which may also place South Africa at a higher risk of incursion between December and May. South Africa has not imported any live cattle from Zimbabwe for many years and the import requirements for other risk commodities, including hides, skins and hay, require these commodities to be free of ticks. However, factors such as illegal importation of cattle, or inadvertent introduction of infected ticks via people, hay, hides or cars crossing the border into South Africa, may still pose a risk.



The occurrence of cattle-adapted *Theileria parva* strains could have severe negative effects on livelihoods and the sustainability of the livestock industry. The management, control and/or eradication of this disease require highly intensive and expensive efforts that are difficult to sustain. Therefore, an early warning and immediate eradication of any incursion, should it occur, is of the utmost importance.

Should there be a disease suspicion, frequent acaricide application must be started immediately (at least 3 times within two weeks) and the following samples must be collected by an official veterinarian:

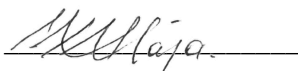
- (a) From live animals: peripheral blood smears, full blood samples in heparin and in EDTA, serum samples
- (b) From postmortem cases: Peripheral blood smears, impression smears from visceral organs, visceral and lymphoid tissue, etc

Collected samples must be sent immediately to Onderstepoort Veterinary Laboratory for testing. Samples must be submitted via the state veterinarian and sample submission forms must be completed in full, including full details about the location, reasons for testing and the history of the case.

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development encourages everyone to practice strict biosecurity measures to reduce the risk of all animal diseases, including not introducing animals of unknown health status into their herds. Regular treatment of cattle to reduce tick loads is strongly advised as a measure to reduce exposure to the vectors of many tick-borne diseases, including *Theileria* spp., while the involvement of professionals is encouraged to combat the risks of acaricide resistance.

Your assistance and cooperation in this matter will be appreciated.

Kind regards



Dr Mpho Maja

DIRECTOR ANIMAL HEALTH

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