

Johne's checklist

With Johne's disease tipped to become a major problem for the deer industry, it pays to know what to look for.

Nowadays, the disease is showing up more and more in young deer, says Invermay scientist Dr Colin Mackintosh.

Signs to watch for

- At first, 5-10 per cent of a mob fail to thrive. In spring they may look patchy or moth-eaten.
- They start to scour, develop obvious soiling with green faecal material around the tail, hind quarters and hocks, and start to lose weight.
- The disease can run from days to months, but generally the younger the animal, the quicker the progress to emaciation and death. In outbreaks, the most common age of onset is eight to 20 months.



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- Sporadic cases may also occur in older deer, although they appear less likely to develop clinical disease than young animals.
- Deer are probably susceptible to both cattle and sheep strains of Johne's, and there's evidence the disease has been transferred to deer from these species.
- Where JD occurs in weaners, it's likely the infection is present in the breeding hinds.

To prevent infection, Dr Mackintosh recommends avoiding grazing sheep and cattle around deer, maintaining a closed herd, and keeping finishing weaners away from other stock.

The Johne's vaccine Neoparasac has not been tested on deer, although it may give some protection if used during the first 48 hours of life. A drawback is that the vaccine would interfere with skin testing for Tb, and would also make the venison ineligible for export. ●