

# BOVINE LEUKOSIS VIRUS



Bovine leukosis virus (BLV) causes a disease found in dairy and beef cattle. According to UC Davis, 30-40% of all cattle in the United States test positive for BLV. Once infected, an animal will remain infected with BLV for life.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), as many as 1 in twenty BLV-positive animals will develop malignant cancer characterized by tumors that invade vital tissues. The economic loss from this untreatable disease is significant and includes:

- Lost milk production
- Premature marketing
- Increased death loss
- Condemnation at slaughter
- Export restrictions

Most infections take place early in the life of a calf when virus is transmitted in the milk. BLV transmission can occur during daily activities such as ear tagging, dehorning, and tattooing by transmitting contaminated blood between animals. Infected blood can also be transmitted by biting insects such as horseflies.

Clinical signs of BLV include:

- Reduced appetite/weight loss
- Decreased milk production
- Enlarged lymph nodes
- Partial paralysis of the hind legs
- Fever
- Abnormal breathing
- Bulging eyes
- Diarrhea and constipation

The Rocky Mountain Regional Animal Health Laboratory (RMRAHL) currently offers two tests to detect antibodies to BLV. These include agar gel immunodiffusion (AGID) and enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA). Please contact your veterinarian or the lab for more information.

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