Paratuberculosis or Johne’s disease affects cattle, sheep, goats and certain wild animal species. The disease is of long duration and may cause diarrhoea and loss of mass in older (from 2 years on) animals.

The diarrhoea cannot be treated.

- Young animals are more susceptible and usually become infected after taking in food or water contaminated with the faeces of infected animals.
- Repeated exposure is necessary before the organisms can establish themselves in the intestinal tract.
- Most of the infected animals continue to shed bacteria intermittently in their faeces throughout their lifetime.
- The disease usually spreads slowly in an infected herd.
- Most animals do not show symptoms and it may be years before the disease is eventually diagnosed in a herd (subclinical infection).

**Clinical symptoms**

The time before the disease becomes apparent in a herd varies from less than 6 months to several years (even 15 years). A very small percentage of the animals show clinical signs. Affected animals develop a diarrhoea of long duration and lose condition (emaciation).

**Differential diagnosis**

Johne’s disease should not be confused with other conditions which also cause a loss of condition, including worm infestation, coccidiosis or malnutrition. In cattle the disease can be confused with chronic fascioliasis and paramphistomiasis.
Control

Paratuberculosis is difficult to control because:
• a long period may pass before the disease becomes apparent in a herd
• there are no clinical signs in the early stages of the disease
• it is difficult to make a diagnosis in a live animal
• affected animals cannot be treated successfully.

Control of Johne’s disease in a flock is based on the following procedures:
• the elimination of infected animals (emaciated animals) by slaughtering
• strict hygiene to prevent the spread of the infection (especially feed and water troughs)
• only buy animals from farms which have been tested negative
• ensure that boundary fences are in a good condition
• stud flocks must be tested
• try to keep the flock as young as possible
• lambing should take place on clean pastures
• vaccination may in some cases be of value.

Remember the following

• Ruminants should not be kept on the farm or premises for at least 2 years before restocking takes place.
• All cases of loss of condition (emaciation) and diarrhoea should be investigated.
• Contact your nearest state veterinarian for further information.