

# BLACKLEG OF CATTLE

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Blackleg is one of the most deadly maladies that affect cattle between the ages of four months and two years. Although it is an old and well known disease, it still causes enormous losses among the cattle of Texas every year. These losses are inexcusable. Cattlemen's negligence is solely to blame. The causes, means of spread, and methods of prevention are well known. If this knowledge were used to its maximum advantage, blackleg losses would be of no consequence.

Blackleg is most likely to occur in the spring and fall seasons when frequent rains wash the spores up on the grass where they are easily picked up by grazing cattle.

Purebred cattle seem more susceptible than grade cattle, and those in good condition seem more susceptible than thin cattle.

## CAUSE

Blackleg is caused by a germ, *Clostridium chauveii*, which has the ability to retreat into a resting (spore) stage and survive for long periods. Ground contaminated by the discharges of an infected animal, or the residue of an infected carcass, may harbor this infection for years.

Cattle become infected with blackleg by picking up this germ on grass while grazing on infected ground or by getting a wound contaminated with dust or dirt that is carrying the spore of *Clostridium chauveii*. Infections of this type are common where calves are castrated and dehorned in old lots or corrals.

## SYMPTOMS

Calves affected with blackleg are not often seen until after death. In some cases only a few hours elapse from the time the animal has visible symptoms until death occurs.

The onset of the disease is sudden with marked depression and a sharp rise in body temperature. This is followed closely by stiffness or lameness, hard breathing, and rapidly developing swellings under the skin. When stroked, these swellings feel as if they were filled with cellophane and emit a crackling sound.

After death the carcass rapidly fills with gas and presents a strutted appearance with the upper legs held stiffly in the air. There is usually a bloody discharge from the nose and anus.

## PREVENTION

All calves should be vaccinated before they are four months old. It is best to earmark calves as they are vaccinated so that unvaccinated animals may be positively identified. Calves missed during vaccination account for a large part of the annual loss from blackleg. Calves suspected of having blackleg should be removed immediately to a spot that can be disinfected. Animals which have died of blackleg should be completely burned or removed by a rendering company. Premises contaminated by animals sick or dead of blackleg should be sprinkled liberally with chlorinated lime. Floors or other surfaced areas should be washed with a two percent lye solution.

## TREATMENT

If an animal is suspected of having blackleg, a veterinarian should be called. Blackleg is often confused with anthrax, malignant edema, and other serious septicemic diseases. If given immediate skilled treatment, recovery can be expected in animals that have not advanced to a critical stage.

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