

Cattle buyers' checklist



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Buying cattle: Know the risks

Buying in livestock could introduce new diseases to your farm. The costs of a disease outbreak can be huge and have long-lasting effects. This guide looks at biosecurity measures you can set up before buying and making purchasing decisions which reduce the risk of disease coming onto your farm.

Biosecurity before buying cattle

Work with your vet to create a biosecurity plan for incoming animals. Putting protocols in place and making sure all staff are familiar with them gives clear guidance to all on how to complete biosecurity measures and why they are important.

If your new purchases are not as healthy as they first appear these actions will minimise the impact of any brought in disease for existing livestock and farm finances.

Quarantine and test purchased stock

On arrival, quarantine bought-in stock for at least three weeks in a double-fenced field or separate building away from the rest of your livestock.

Observe them for signs of disease and complete any tests, vaccines or treatments required based on the recommendations of your vet. Continue to monitor and assess new stock so you are aware of any changes to health or behaviour.

Maintain high biosecurity around quarantined stock to prevent potential disease spread. See the 'Keep clean' section on page 4 (overleaf).



Keep clean

Use these tips to maintain high biosecurity:

- Ideally, use separate designated equipment for quarantined stock areas and mark for use only in those areas
- Clean and disinfect machinery between uses if it is used with both existing and quarantined stock
- Use detergent and a hot pressure washer to get rid of organic matter, then follow with disinfectant. Using disinfectant on a dirty surface will not kill pathogens, so thorough physical cleaning with detergent must come first
- Use the Defra list (disinfectants.defra.gov.uk) to check that the product you use protects against the diseases you are at risk from and you are using it at the correct dilution rate. Ask your vet for further advice
- Visit and handle quarantined stock last, after you have handled your existing livestock
- Change clothes before and after checking your quarantined stock to prevent the spread of pathogens
- Clean your boots and dip them in disinfectant when moving between existing and quarantined stock areas
- Ideally, quarantined livestock should have a designated member of staff

For more information on appropriate biosecurity, visit ahdb.org.uk/biosecurity

Ask the seller

These questions are not an exclusive list and should be used to prompt conversation with the seller. This will help you feel confident that your purchase will have a positive impact on your herd.

Biosecurity questions

When did the seller last bring in any new animals?

Over 10 years ago	Between 1 and 10 years ago	Multiple times per year
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Lower risk

Higher risk

If they are a closed herd, do they use a stock bull, a hired bull or only use AI?

AI only	Stock bull	Hired bull
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Lower risk

Higher risk

How long is their quarantine period?

3 weeks or more	1 to 2 weeks	No quarantine period
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Lower risk

Higher risk

Can their cattle make physical contact with neighbouring livestock (the gap between herds is less than 3 metres)?

No	Yes
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Lower risk

Higher risk

Is the holding part of an assurance scheme or do they have a Veterinary Attestation Number (VAN)?

Yes – multiple years	Yes – newly enrolled / has VAN	No
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Lower risk

Higher risk

Does the holding have a herd health plan?

Yes	No
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Lower risk

Higher risk

Visual assessment

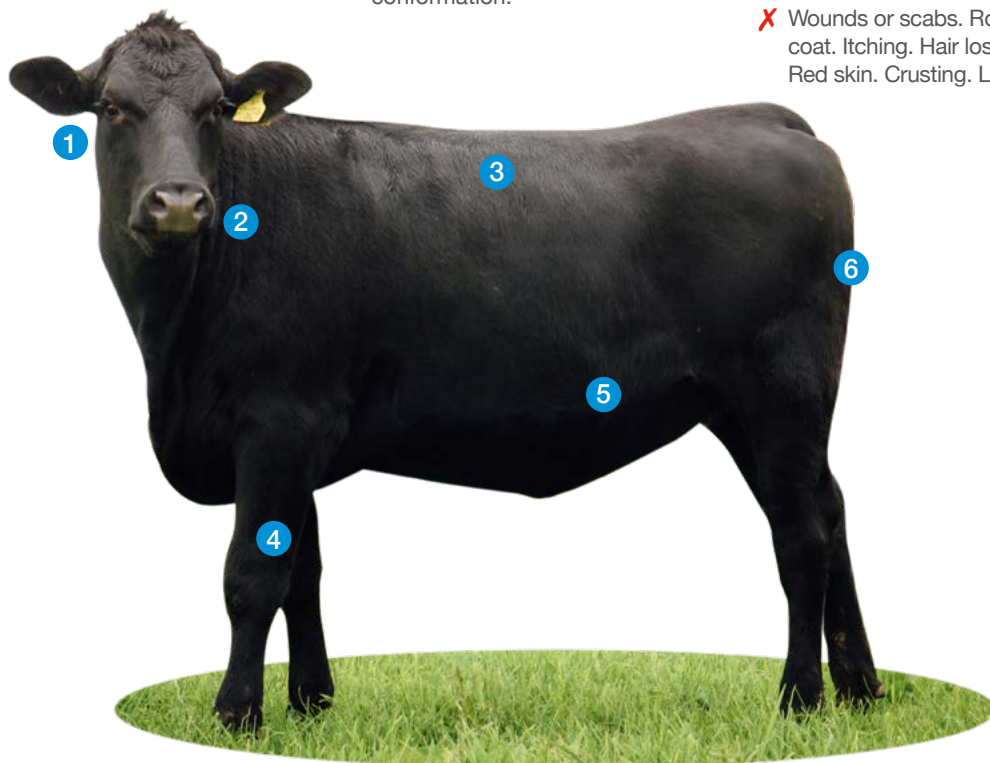
A visual assessment of potential new stock is important to check they are what you were expecting and to check for any health conditions present that may not have been disclosed in the advert. If safe to do so, work from head to tail, looking for key signs that the animal is healthy. Some examples of red and green flags are included for consideration when assessing stock.

For more information on suspected or diagnosed health conditions, speak to your vet and see the **Cattle disease directory**.

General health

✓ Expected size, weight and condition for age across the group. Clean. Correct ear tags. Relaxed. Good conformation. Target body condition score.

✗ Poor condition. Small size for age. Large size variation within group of the same age. Dirty animals. Dirty housing. Missing ear tags. Fearful or aggressive. Poor conformation.



1. Eyes

- ✓ Clean, bright, clear eyes. Pink membranes. Normal blinking.
- ✗ Discharge. Tearing. Crusting. Redness. Growths. Blindness. Squinting.

2. Respiratory

- ✓ Clean nose and mouth. Normal breathing.
- ✗ Coughing. Sneezing. Nasal discharge. Red nose. Fast or noisy breathing.

3. Skin

- ✓ Clean and shiny coat. Smooth skin.
- ✗ Wounds or scabs. Rough coat. Itching. Hair loss. Red skin. Crusting. Lumps.

4. Legs

- ✓ Even gait when walking and running. Standing square. Clean feet. Smooth claws. Good conformation.
- ✗ Lameness evident. Shifting weight. Holding or favouring leg when walking or standing. Swollen joints or feet. Discharge, crusting or redness between claws. Overgrown, cracked or ridged hooves.

5. Breeding

- ✓ Cows: Clean and pink vulva. Normal udder.
- ✓ Bulls: Clean prepuce. Scrotum within recommended size for age and breed. Firm testicles.
- ✗ Cows: Discharge, redness, swelling or scarring at vulva. Swollen or hard udder. C-section scar or shaved patch on left side of cow.
- ✗ Bulls: Discharge or swelling at prepuce. Urine-stained belly. Lumpy, small or swollen testicles.

6. Digestion

- ✓ Clean around tail and hindlimbs. Ruminating and chewing cud. Normal consistency faeces (diet dependant).
- ✗ Faeces staining or hair loss around tail and hind limbs. Loose or foul-smelling faeces. Straining to pass faeces.

Questions to avoid common diseases

Lower the risk of buying in the diseases listed below by asking the seller about their disease statuses before purchasing. The list below includes common diseases which can be tested, vaccinated or accredited for.

Johne's	Lower risk					Medium risk		Higher risk	
Has the source herd had any confirmed or suspected cases?	No								Yes
Does the source herd test for Johne's at least annually?	Yes								No
Have the cattle to be purchased tested negative for Johne's?	Yes								No
Is the source herd accredited for Johne's? If so, what is its CHeCS accreditation level?	R1 – 3 years free	R2 – 1 or 2 years free	R3 – less than 3% cases	R4 – More than 3% cases	R5 – Not adhering to protocol				Not accredited

Bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD)	Lower risk					Medium risk		Higher risk	
Has the source herd had any confirmed or suspected cases?	No								Yes
Does the source herd test for BVD antibodies at least annually?	Yes								No
Have the cattle to be purchased tested negative for BVD?	Yes (antigen negative)	Yes (antibody negative)							No
Are the animals to be purchased pregnant?	No								Yes
Is the source herd vaccinated against BVD?	Yes								No
Is the source herd accredited free of BVD? If so, what is its CHeCS accreditation level?	Accredited free	Monitored vaccinated free	Eradication						Not accredited

Leptospirosis	Lower risk					Medium risk		Higher risk	
Has the source herd had any confirmed or suspected cases?	No								Yes
Is the source herd vaccinated against leptospirosis?	Yes								No
Have the cattle to be purchased tested negative for leptospirosis?	Yes								No
Is the source herd accredited as leptospirosis free? If so, what is its CHeCS accreditation level?	Accredited free	Monitored vaccinated free	Eradication						Not accredited

Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR)	Lower risk					Medium risk		Higher risk	
Has the source herd had any confirmed or suspected cases?	No								Yes
Is the source herd vaccinated against IBR?	Yes								No
Have the cattle to be purchased tested negative for IBR?	Yes								No
Is the source herd accredited as IBR free? If so, what is its CHeCS accreditation level?	Accredited free	Monitored vaccinated free	Eradication						Not accredited

Neospora

	Lower risk		Medium risk		Higher risk	
Has the source herd had any confirmed or suspected cases?	No				Yes	
Have the cattle to be purchased tested negative for neospora?	Yes				No	
Is the source herd accredited for neospora? If so, what is its CHaCS accreditation level?	R1 – 3 years free	R2 – 1 or 2 years free	R3 – less than 5% cases	R4 – More than 5% cases	R5 – Not adhering to protocol	Not accredited

Bovine tuberculosis (bTb)

	Lower risk		Medium risk		Higher risk	
Will the animals be pre-movement tested?	Yes				No	
How long has the herd been officially TB free?	5+ years		2 to 4 years		Less than a year	
Are the cattle from an equal or lower risk TB zone?	Lower risk		Equal		Higher risk	
Is the source herd accredited for TB? If so, what is its CHaCS accreditation level?	Score 10	Score 0 to 9	Entry-level membership		Not accredited	

Parasites

	Lower risk		Medium risk		Higher risk	
Does the source farm have a parasite control plan?	Yes				No	
Have the animals to be purchased been tested for gut worms?	Low faecal egg count			High faecal egg count	Not tested	
Is there any evidence of any external parasites such as ringworm or lice?	No				Yes	
Does the source farm have a history of lungworm that matches your own farm's history?	Yes				No	
Have the animals to be purchased had a clear test for lungworm?	Yes				No	
Is the source herd vaccinated against lungworm?	Yes				No	
Does the source farm have a history of liver fluke?	No				Yes	
Have the animals to be purchased had a clear test for liver fluke in the last year?	Yes				No	

Source: CHaCS

Not all cattle diseases are listed, so it is important to also carry out a visual assessment and ask general herd health questions that might highlight other health issues.
Speak to your vet for further information.

Further information

AHDB publications

- Cattle diseases directory
- Parasite control guide

Online resources

- Biosecurity (ahdb.org.uk/biosecurity)
- CHeCs – The role of biosecurity (checs.co.uk/getting-started/the-role-of-biosecurity)
- COWS – Control Of Worms Sustainably (cattleparasites.org.uk)
- **gov.uk** – Beef cattle and dairy cows: Health regulations (gov.uk/guidance/cattle-health)
- NADIS – Biosecurity for dairy and beef cattle (nadis.org.uk/disease-a-z/cattle/biosecurity-for-dairy-and-beef-cattle)

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Produced for you by:

AHDB

Middlemarch Business Park
Siskin Parkway East
Coventry
CV3 4PE

T 024 7669 2051

E comms@ahdb.org.uk

W ahdb.org.uk



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