

Contagious Mastitis



Photo: Julie Smith, DVM, Ph.D

CAUSES: The major causes of contagious mastitis are *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Streptococcus agalactiae*, and *Mycoplasma spp.*

EFFECT: General signs of mastitis (inflammation of the udder) are elevated somatic cell count (SCC) and decreased milk production. Economic losses result from lost milk due to the infection itself and from antibiotic treatment.

How is contagious mastitis spread? Contagious mastitis organisms are more dependent on close contact with their host for survival than are organisms that cause what is termed “environmental” mastitis. Contagious mastitis can be spread from one cow to the next during milking routines by the milkers’ hands or by the milking equipment.

How can contagious mastitis be prevented? Focus on keeping udders clean, using pre-dip, milking mastitic cows last, and treating as directed by your veterinarian based on culture and sensitivity results. Culture milk from new cows and fresh heifers to identify a problem before it can spread.

Does contagious mastitis affect people? Contagious mastitis organisms rarely cause infections in humans, but may be harbored on hands.

What if there is an outbreak? *Strep. ag.* can be eradicated from a herd by using appropriate antibiotic therapy. *Staph. aureus*, on the other hand, is quite resistant to antibiotic therapy. Staph-positive cows should be segregated into their own string. *Mycoplasma*, too, is resistant to antibiotic therapy. Cows with Myco should be segregated or culled.

For more information on contagious mastitis, see:

[NMC: A Practical Look at Contagious Mastitis](#)

[USDF APHIS Info Sheet: Prevalence of Contagious Mastitis Pathogens on U.S. Dairy Operations, 2007](#)

The Merck Veterinary Manual: Mastitis in [Cattle](#), [Goats](#), [Ewes](#), [Mares](#), and [Sows](#)