



The surveillance programme for paratuberculosis in Norway 2024

REPORT 39/2025

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Suggested citation

Kampen, Annette H, Tessema, Girum T, Hermansen, Lene, Valheim, Mette, Hopp, Petter. The surveillance programme for paratuberculosis in Norway 2024. Surveillance programme report. Veterinærinstituttet 2025. © Norwegian Veterinary Institute, copy permitted with citation

Quality controlled by

Merete Hofshagen, Director of Animal Health, Animal Welfare and Food Safety, Norwegian Veterinary Institute

Commissioned by

Norwegian Food Safety Authority



Published

2025 on www.vetinst.no
ISSN 1890-3290 (electronic edition)
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Cover photo: Colourbox
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Summary

In 2024, *Mycobacterium avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* was not detected in Norway.

Introduction

Paratuberculosis in ruminants is a notifiable disease (List 2) in Norway. *Mycobacterium avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* infection was first diagnosed in cattle and goats in Norway in 1907 and 1934, respectively (1, 2). More recently, *Mycobacterium avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* was detected for the first time in sheep in 2002 and in alpaca in 2014 (3).

The control of this disease is enforced by government legislation and includes restrictions on animal movement.

In goat herds, government restrictions combined with vaccination was previously used to control paratuberculosis. However, in recent years a large proportion of the Norwegian goat herds has undergone a disease eradication programme (4), and vaccination is now prohibited.

A national surveillance programme for paratuberculosis in cattle was established in 1996 (5, 6). The programme was extended to llamas and alpacas in 2000, goats in 2001, and sheep in 2002.

Descriptions of occurrence of the disease in Norway, control measures adopted until 1995, and results from the surveillance programmes from 1996 to 2001, can be found in the annual report for 2001 (6). The number of new infected herds detected since 1996 when the surveillance programme started, is given in Figure 1.

Aim

The aim of the surveillance programme for paratuberculosis is to detect and control the infection in the Norwegian ruminant and camelid population.

Materials and methods

In 2024, cattle and goats were included in the programme. Faecal samples were collected at farms, and organs were collected at slaughterhouses, by the Norwegian Food Safety Authority.

Active surveillance

Cattle

The target population consisted of all cattle herds with dairy cows or suckler cows according to the register of production subsidies as of October 2023. Two hundred cattle herds were selected for sampling. Faecal samples from the five oldest animals in each herd were to be collected.

Goats

Eighty herds were selected by a risk-based strategy, selecting more herds in areas where paratuberculosis has previously been detected. Fifty goat herds were selected for sampling from areas where paratuberculosis has previously been detected, while thirty goat herds were selected from historically paratuberculosis free areas. Faecal samples from the ten oldest goats in each herd were to be collected.

Camelids

In addition to the planned samples from cattle and goats, samples from two llamas and three alpacas were received in January 2024.

Passive clinical surveillance

Clinical surveillance has been part of the programme since 2000. Samples are collected from cattle older than three years that show clinical signs like reduced milk production, weight loss, diarrhoea lasting more than 14 days, and from other species on clinical suspicion.

Methods

A real-time PCR-method was used for detection of *M. avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* genome in the faecal samples (7). This test is based on amplification of the DNA segment IS900 target present in multiple copies of *Mycobacterium avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* genome.

For faecal sample preparation approximately 2 - 3 g of the sample was diluted in sterile demineralised water (1% dilution, w/v). The faecal mixture was filtered using the ADIAFILTER (Bio-X Diagnostics, Belgium). The sample was further subjected to mechanical destruction by use of glass beads and disrupted with a homogenizer. The lysate was used for extraction of nucleic acids before real-time PCR using the ADIAVET® REALTIME PARATB kit (Bio-X Diagnostics, Belgium).

In case faecal samples tested positive by PCR, further confirmation would have been performed by bacterial culture test.

Organ samples were examined for macroscopic pathological changes, and histopathological examination would be performed if lesions were present. In addition, bacteriological confirmatory diagnostic tests would be performed.

Results

In 2024, samples from 803 cattle and 450 goats were all tested negative for *M. avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* by PCR. None of the faecal samples in the 2024 surveillance programme were positive by PCR, and thus bacteriological culture was not performed.

No organ samples were received in the surveillance programme in 2024.

Details on type of samples and number of herds/locations are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of samples analysed for *Mycobacterium avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* in the 2024 surveillance programme.

Species	Type of sampling	Number of animals (herds or locations)			
		Faecal	Cadavers/Organs	Total positive	Total analysed
Cattle	Risk-based samples	803 (161)	-	0 (0)	803 (161)
	Suspected cases	-	-		
Goats	Risk-based samples	450 (61)	-	0 (0)	450 (61)
	Suspected cases	-	-		
Camelids	Risk-based samples	5 (2)	-	0 (0)	5 (2)
	Suspected cases	-	-		

Since the surveillance programme for paratuberculosis started in 1996, *M. avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* has been detected in altogether 35 goat herds (some of these also positive before 1996), 11 cattle herds, six sheep flocks, and two alpaca herds (Figure 1). In the figure, only herds where *M. avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* is detected for the first time are presented. However, a herd that has previously been reported as positive for *M. avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis*, can be counted as a herd with new cases again if *M. avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* is reported in a different ruminant species.

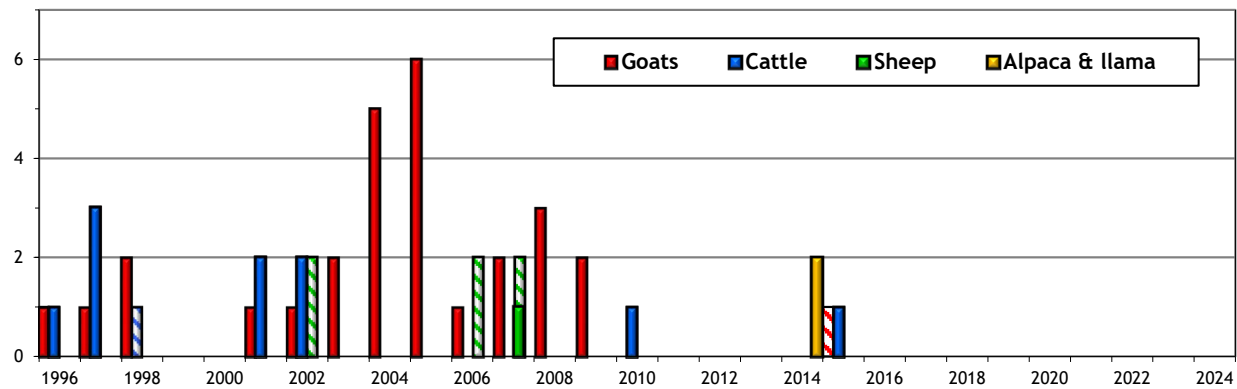


Figure 1. Number of new herds being reported positive for *Mycobacterium avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* irrespective whether the samples were collected as part of the surveillance programme or not. Striped bars represent herds where another species in the same holding previously was reported positive.

Discussion

Mycobacterium avium subsp. *paratuberculosis* was not detected in Norway in 2024.

Paratuberculosis in goats has previously been detected in five out of the 14 counties in Norway (8). All the cases among cattle and sheep have been traced to imported animals (seven cattle herds, one sheep flock) or contact with infected goats (three cattle herds, five sheep flocks). Importation of live cattle is limited and largely replaced by importation of semen and embryos.

The dairy organisation (TINE) and the Norwegian Goat Health Services have conducted an eradication programme named “Healthier goats”, targeting three infectious diseases that were previously widespread in goats; namely caprine arthritis encephalitis, caseous lymphadenitis and paratuberculosis. In total 612 goat herds were included in the programme from 2001 to 2014 (4).

All dairy goat herds in Norway have joined the eradication programme. All known goat herds diagnosed with paratuberculosis have joined the eradication programme or have slaughtered their animals. Hence, Norway is in the unique position in the world of currently having no known positive cases of paratuberculosis (9).

In February 2024, one sample from a sheep flock tested in relation with livestock trade was positive for antibodies in a serological test for paratuberculosis, resulting in a suspicion for paratuberculosis in the flock. Faecal samples from all adult animals in the flock were negative with PCR, hence the flock was concluded to be negative for paratuberculosis.

Even though the eradication programme has reduced the indigenous source of *M. avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis*, there may still be undetected infected goat herds or other species that pose a risk for new infections to the Norwegian ruminant population in the coming years. Furthermore, imports of cattle, sheep, goats, llamas and alpacas as well as import of animal feed, for example hay, may present risk for new introduction of *M. avium* subsp. *paratuberculosis* infection into the Norwegian ruminant population.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the technical staff for performing the analyses with excellence. In particular, Hilde Welde has contributed substantially to the project.

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