We continue to track confirmed cases of Blackleg (Clostridium chauvoei) that are submitted to our laboratory. Blackleg is a disease of mostly beef cattle with a quick onset that can result in acute death with no prior signs of illness. The organism is in the soil everywhere so the risk for infection is ever-present. Sadly, the disease affects those animals in the best overall condition and health and just about any age with most cases seen in ages 6-24 months. Often, the large muscles will become edematous and swell.

In the fall of 2006, our laboratory surveillance system generated an alert based on a statistical up-tick in confirmed Blackleg cases. LDDC mounted an awareness campaign to encourage vaccination against the disease which is nearly 100% effective and inexpensive. As you can see in this graph, cases confirmed at our laboratory declined significantly since that time and for the last two years have been minimal. Calves should be vaccinated twice two weeks apart at roughly 6 months of age; revaccination each succeeding year is recommended.

Blackleg should be suspected whenever you see sudden death in your herd. We encourage you to submit whole animals for a complete necropsy and work-up ($30 adult/$20 < 1 yr) in these situations to protect the health of the rest of your herd. Please call Dr. Deb Williams, Diagnostic Services Section Chief, if you have any questions regarding submission and testing.

Graphic by Jackie L. Smith, M.S.
Section Chief, Scientist II-Epidemiology
LDDC

CRAIG N. CARTER, DVM MS PhD Dip. ACVPM DSNAP
Director & Professor, Epidemiology
Livestock Disease Diagnostic Center
Department of Veterinary Science