

American foulbrood positive diagnosis – what should you do?

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Bee diseases and their characteristic signs can be very confusing to many beekeepers. Wrong diagnosis can be a major problem, particularly when serious brood diseases are involved such as American foulbrood (AFB).

AFB disease is the most serious brood disease of bees in NSW. It is caused by the bacterium *Paenibacillus larvae*. In Australia, it has been found in all states. It is a disease of economic importance to the individual beekeeper and to the bee industry, as infection may lead to serious economic loss through the destruction of colonies and loss of production.

Beekeepers can obtain accurate diagnoses by sending samples of suspect material to NSW DPI Regional Veterinary Laboratories.

If you receive a positive laboratory report for AFB you are advised to:

- Examine all brood combs in the hives in the infected apiary within 2 weeks, and all other hives owned or managed by you within 6 weeks.
- If you do not think you are able to recognise AFB signs, contact a NSW Department of Primary Industries Apiary Officer or Regulatory Officer for advice.
- Notify an Inspector (regulatory officer) immediately if any hives appear to have suspicious signs.

Note: American foulbrood is a notifiable disease under the NSW Apiaries Act 1985.

Keep any hives showing signs of disease isolated from hives that appear healthy. Make sure you do not transfer infection.

- Do not use infected material in healthy hives.
- Do not transfer combs or any hive components from diseased to healthy hives.
- Kill infected colonies as soon as practical and either prepare for irradiation (see Primefact 194 *American foulbrood disease – sending beehive material for irradiation*) or burn infected material in a hole and cover remains with at least 30 cm of soil. Take note of any fire restrictions.

- Always handle healthy hives before diseased ones.
- Do not feed antibiotics to infected hives as this only masks the problem.
- Always inspect weaker non-performing colonies to determine the reason.
- Do not expose honey to robber bees.
- Do not under any circumstances allow infected colonies to die out and allow robber bees access to infected material. This will seriously increase the disease problem in the apiary and surrounding area.

Re-examine your hives every two months to make sure that you have found all the diseased hives. Report any suspicious or positive signs of AFB to an inspector.

Phone NSW Department of Primary Industries on (02) 6741 8374 or refer to the web at <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/honey-bees/contacts>

Further information

Primefact 672 [American foulbrood overview](#).

Primefact 209 [American foulbrood](#).

Primefact 39 [American foulbrood disease – inspection management](#).

Agnote DAI209 [Samples for disease diagnosis \(what to send\)](#).

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