



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency

APHA Briefing Note 04/20

Phased introduction of default six-monthly surveillance TB testing of cattle herds in the High Risk Area of England

Date issued: 05 March 2020, last updated 18 August 2020

Purpose

1. To inform Official Veterinarians that from September 2020 cattle herds in the High Risk Area (HRA) counties of **Staffordshire and Shropshire** will move from annual to six-monthly surveillance testing.
2. Lower bTB risk herds in these two counties that meet certain criteria for 'earned recognition' will be eligible to remain on annual surveillance testing.

Background

3. Following a public consultation, Defra announced in 2018 that default six-monthly TB surveillance testing of cattle herds would replace annual testing in the HRA of England.
4. To reduce the burden on the Veterinary Delivery Partners (VDP) and cattle keepers, six-monthly surveillance testing will be phased in gradually from September 2020.
5. Cattle herds at lower risk of a TB breakdown will remain on annual surveillance testing, mirroring the 'earned recognition' criteria currently applied in the six-monthly testing parts of the Edge Area.
6. Increasing the frequency of surveillance testing in the HRA from annual to six-monthly will help detect TB-infected herds at an earlier stage. This reduces the time *M. bovis* can spread within the herd, be transmitted to other herds, and potentially shed in the farm environment.

7. This surveillance testing change is consistent with Professor Godfray's review of the government's bTB eradication strategy which suggested that the sensitivity of TB surveillance testing should be increased.
8. Moving to six-monthly surveillance testing will also allow APHA to reduce the number of ad hoc, unplanned TB tests such as tracing and contiguous tests.
9. In March 2020 APHA communicated that the roll out of this policy would commence from April 2020, but due to the COVID19 outbreak this had to be postponed.

Phased introduction of six-monthly surveillance testing in the HRA

10. From September 2020, six-monthly surveillance testing will be introduced in the HRA counties of **Staffordshire and Shropshire** during phase 1 of rollout. Lower bTB risk herds in these counties that meet criteria for earned recognition will remain on annual surveillance testing.
11. Cattle herds in Staffordshire and Shropshire will complete their first routine whole herd test (WHT) scheduled in the period between September 2020 and August 2021 as normal. Once this WHT has been completed with negative results, APHA will schedule the next test for six months later, unless the herd qualifies for earned recognition (i.e. remaining on annual surveillance testing).
12. Herds that complete their annual WHT between September 2020 and February 2021 will have their first six-monthly herd test from March 2021 onwards. Those that complete their annual WHT between March and August 2021 will have their first six-monthly herd test from September 2021.

Contiguous and Trace testing

13. Cattle herds on six-monthly testing will not routinely be required to undergo contiguous testing due to the high frequency of surveillance testing, however APHA may still test in exceptional circumstances.
14. Lower bTB risk cattle herds that qualify for annual surveillance testing will still undergo contiguous testing as per normal APHA procedures. As long as contiguous testing is completed with negative results, it will not affect the herd's eligibility for annual surveillance testing.
15. APHA will still trace animals from breakdown herds with lesion and/or culture positive animals to herds on six-monthly surveillance testing. Where possible, trace tests will be synchronised with a six-monthly WHT, negating the need to test the traced animals separately. Alternatively if there is a long period of time until the next six-monthly herd test, APHA will arrange a stand-alone test for the traced animal(s) as normal.

Earned recognition

16. Upon rollout of six-monthly testing, cattle herds will be eligible to remain on annual surveillance testing if they meet either of the following criteria:
 - the herd has been in existence for at least six years and has not had a TB breakdown in that six year period. A single break from keeping cattle of less than four months during the six year period is permitted
 - the herd is registered to a bovine TB health scheme accredited under the Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHeCS) at level 1 or above
17. Prior to rollout of phase 1, APHA will identify all cattle herds in Staffordshire and Shropshire that qualify for annual surveillance testing under the eligibility criteria. From September 2020, APHA will write to cattle keepers whose herds are eligible to remain on annual testing to let them know that their herd testing interval will stay the same.
18. APHA will make an initial assessment of eligibility and then continue to check eligibility every six months.
19. Eligibility updates every six months will result in some herds becoming eligible (when they reach six years officially TB free, or level 1 or above CHeCS accreditation), but also some herds losing eligibility due to having a TB breakdown or prolonged/multiple breaks from keeping cattle.

Communications with cattle keepers

20. All cattle keepers in Staffordshire and Shropshire will receive a letter from APHA notifying them of the change to surveillance testing. Cattle keepers in other HRA counties will not be affected by this change until phase 2 of rollout begins, and further details on this will follow.
21. Upon changing to six-monthly surveillance testing, keepers wishing to amend the testing window of their first six-monthly WHT are being advised to check first with their OV/PVS that they can accommodate the proposed change before contacting APHA. The test window will only be amended **once** and only to bring the test **forward**, not back. This will allow some degree of flexibility for cattle keepers, and also try to mitigate the risk of bottlenecks in testing at certain times of the year. Cattle keepers will be advised by APHA that if they do not discuss proposed changes to their testing window with their OV/PVS, they risk the test becoming overdue with associated penalties for basic farm payment claimants.
22. If a keeper wishes for their herd to move to six-monthly surveillance testing even if they qualify for earned recognition, then they must notify APHA of their preference.

Relevant documents

23. None for PVSs/OVs.

Further information

24. Detailed Q&A on the introduction of default six-monthly surveillance testing in the HRA is available on the TB hub <http://www.tbhub.co.uk/>

25. More information about CHeCS is available on their website <https://www.cheecs.co.uk/>.

26. The Government response to the Godfray review of Defra's bTB eradication strategy for England can be accessed on [GOV.UK](http://gov.uk).

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