



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency

APHA Briefing Note 07/20

Advice for OVs undertaking Visits during the COVID-19 Outbreak.

Date issued: 20 March 2020

Purpose

To provide guidance relating to access to farms for Official Veterinarians who will be undertaking official visits during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Background

1. The latest advice from Government regarding COVID-19 is available on [GOV.UK](#), [GOV.Wales](#) and [GOV.Scot](#). Please check regularly for updates as the situation is changing rapidly and guidance may change.
2. Most visits should be carried out as normal, following existing biosecurity protocols with no need for additional PPE or biosecurity precautions other than those generally advised to limit COVID-19 disease transmission, namely handwashing and social distancing.
3. It is advisable to call ahead of the visit to explain to the owner/keeper the reason for the visit, what is expected of them and ascertain that the visit can be conducted as normal.
4. As the outbreak progresses there will be occasions when OV access to premises will be difficult or restricted due to:
 - a. the owner/keeper or members of their household having symptoms of COVID-19 and self-isolating.
 - b. the owner/keeper is in one of the higher risk groups and is self-isolating.

- c. the owner/keeper is not in group a or b above but is unwilling to allow inspectors/OVs onto the premises because of concerns that the visit may present an infection risk.

General Principles

5. Any OV who is showing symptoms or lives in a house with anybody showing symptoms should be self-isolating and not carrying out official visits.
6. The validity of an owner/keeper's self-declaration of having symptoms or needing to self-isolate should not be challenged.
7. There should be no face to face contact with farmers or farm workers who have self-declared symptoms of COVID-19 that started within the last 7 days. Information gathering and discussions should be by phone.
8. There should be no pressure applied to owners/keepers who are self-isolating due to being in a high-risk group to meet OVs face to face. Again information gathering and discussions should be by phone. Owners/keepers who are in these high risk groups but who are willing to meet OVs should not be discouraged from doing so but as in all visits hand washing and social distancing should be strictly observed.
9. If access is difficult due to any of the three reasons in 4 above, discussions should be held with the owner/keeper to try and find a solution acceptable to both parties to allow the visit to go ahead (e.g. increased PPE to include wearing of a fitted face mask). OVs should demonstrate flexibility in their approach in accommodating owners/keepers reasonable wishes.

Specific Circumstances

10. TB testing visits should continue wherever possible. OVs should make reasonable endeavours to structure tests to comply with farmer's wishes. Delays in some tests may be inevitable but the COVID-19 situation will not affect the disease control need to apply restrictions on farms with overdue tests (and suspend OTF status) in line with established procedures. Guidance on the prioritisation of tests has been issued and further guidance is in preparation.
11. The closure of schools along with some OVs needing to self-isolate may result in local difficulties in resourcing programmed TB tests. APHA is consulting with Defra, Welsh Government and Scottish Government on further prioritisation guidance in addition to that already issued. However starting 23rd March there are likely to be difficulties experienced by some practices in carrying out the planned testing. Please make the best decisions you can under the circumstances to enable as much of the testing to be carried out as possible.
12. It is recognised that each situation will be different and while most will be resolved by sensible discussion between the OV and the owner/keeper there are likely to be cases

that are more difficult to resolve and advice should be sort from senior staff in APHA/VDPs.

13. Issued on behalf of Andrew Soldan APHA Veterinary Director and Paul Townsend Deputy Service Delivery Director.