



Animal &  
Plant Health  
Agency

## APHA Briefing Note 13/20

# Advice for OVs undertaking TB testing during the COVID-19 outbreak in Scotland

Date issued: 01 April 2020 (Last updated 16 April 2020)

### Purpose

To provide guidance to Official Veterinarians who will be undertaking official TB testing in Scotland during the COVID-19 outbreak. This guidance refers to both the SICCT skin test and interferon-gamma (IFN- $\gamma$ ) assay, where appropriate.

### Background

1. The latest advice regarding COVID-19 is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) and the [Scottish Government website](https://www.scotland.nhs.uk). Please check regularly for updates as the situation is changing rapidly and guidance may change.
2. APHA have recognised the negative impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the ability of OVs to undertake TB-related activities. There have been reported shortages of staff to complete testing and refusals from farmers to test due to self-isolation.
3. To assist OVs and vets to continue to perform work that supports food safety and the food chain, the Government considers farm vets and OVs as critical workers for the purposes of ongoing childcare. The RCVS and BVA, in consultation with the Chief Veterinary Officer for Scotland, have issued a statement<sup>1</sup> to support this. Further details are available on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers#critical-workers>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/news/coronavirus-rcvs-and-bva-issue-joint-guidance-on-key-worker/> Accessed 24/03/2020

4. The BVA and BCVA have both published recent guidance for vets continuing to TB test, and how it might be done safely<sup>2</sup>.
5. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons has also issued guidance to assist veterinary practices with decision-making in these very challenging and rapidly-changing circumstances<sup>3</sup>.
6. The TB Hub has TB specific information related to COVID-19 outbreak, to support vets and farmers make decisions over the coming weeks. It will be updated regularly.  
<https://tbhub.co.uk/statutory-tb-testing-of-cattle-in-gb-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

## General Principles

7. **TB testing should only continue if it can be done safely in accordance with the public health guidance**  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others>
8. APHA will continue to be supportive of OV's where their dynamic risk assessment finds that the test cannot be carried out safely. This includes when a test has to be abandoned part way through. If this happens, APHA will provide payment for the part test completed.
9. Reference should be made to APHA Briefing Note 07/20<sup>4</sup> for guidance relating to access to farms for OV's who will be undertaking official visits during the COVID-19 outbreak. Please also refer to the latest Scottish Government advice on COVID-19 on <https://www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/>
10. At present we are continuing with TB testing (government or private funded), however the Chief Veterinary Officer for Scotland is keeping this under constant review. Many farmers would prefer to get routine TB testing done before turnout, and OV's are best placed to determine if this can be done safely.
11. At present we will continue with the current allocation of tests to OV's.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bva.co.uk/news-and-blog/news-article/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-updates-for-the-veterinary-profession/> and <https://www.bcva.org.uk/news/bcva-covid-19-latest-guidance-farm-vets> Accessed 29/03/20

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/coronavirus-covid-19/> Accessed 23/03/2020

<sup>4</sup> <http://apha.defra.gov.uk/documents/ov/Briefing-Note-0720.pdf>

12. The situation will continue to be monitored by APHA and reviewed as appropriate.

## Specific Instructions

13. There are currently no changes to current instructions on Flexibility for Routine Surveillance Tests in Scotland.

14. TB testing should only continue if, in the OV's judgement, it can be done safely in accordance with the public health guidance advice. For example, this might mean the farm has good handling facilities to minimise vet-farmer contact; that the minimum number of persons are present at the test whilst maintaining safe handling; and keeping to advice to stay two metres / six feet apart from other personnel.

15. If the TB test is not completed within the testing window, herd restrictions will be issued.

16. Until further advised, if a TB test could not be completed during the test window, for reasons associated with the COVID-19 outbreak, the keeper will not be referred to the Rural Payments Inspection Division (RPID) for cross-compliance penalties for overdue TB testing. The suspension of the reporting of cross-compliance referrals will be kept under review

Issued on behalf of Sheila Voas, CVO Scotland & Anne Marie Wallace, Head of Field Delivery for Scotland.