



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency

APHA Briefing Note 14/20

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

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 Wales during the COVID-19 outbreak. This guidance refers to both the SICCT skin test and any other test used in persistent TB breakdown herds. **Background**

1. The latest advice from Government regarding COVID-19 is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) and the [Welsh Government website](https://www.welsh.gov.uk). Please check regularly for updates as the situation is changing rapidly and guidance may change.
2. APHA have recognised the negative impact the COVID-19 outbreak is having on Veterinary Delivery Partners (VDPs) and OVs undertaking TB-related activities. There have been reported shortages of staff to complete testing and refusals from farmers to present cattle for testing 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 Wales, have issued a statement¹ 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>

¹ <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 safely².
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 circumstances³.
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, in the OV's judgement, it can be done safely in accordance with current COVID-19 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. Reference should be made to APHA Briefing Note 07/20⁴ for guidance relating to access to farms for OVs who will be undertaking official visits during the COVID-19 outbreak. Please also refer to the latest Welsh Government advice on COVID-19 on <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>
9. APHA will continue to be supportive of OVs where their dynamic risk assessment finds that the test cannot be carried out safely. This includes when only some of the herd can immediately be tested, or if the test has to be abandoned part way through. If this happens, APHA will provide payment for the part test completed.
10. At present we are continuing with TB testing (government or private-funded), however the Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales is keeping this under constant review.
11. At present we will continue with the current allocation of tests to VDPs/OVs.
12. The situation will continue to be monitored by APHA and reviewed as appropriate.

² <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

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

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

Specific Instructions

13. OVs are advised to continue to apply prioritisation of tests following guidance provided in APHA Briefing Note 06/20⁵; in short, this prioritises testing in OTF herds over breakdown testing.
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. The keeper and/or relevant OV should advise Veterinary Delivery Partner that a TB test could not be completed during the test window for reasons associated with COVID-19 outbreak.
16. Until further advised, overdue tests due to COVID – 19 outbreak will not be referred to the relevant paying agency for cross compliance penalties and reactors will not be subject to any reduction in compensation due to delayed testing.
17. If the TB test is not completed within the testing window, herd restrictions will be issued and overdue testing procedures will be applied automatically.
18. In Wales there is no change to the testing window for OTF (Officially Tuberculosis Free) herds but cattle keepers wishing to test up to 30 days before the testing window opens can do so by contacting their OV practice and APHA.
19. In breakdown herds, Short Interval testing will continue to be scheduled with an earliest activity start date 60 days after the last reactor removal, with a testing window set automatically for 30 days. If it is not possible to test within the pre-set window due to valid reasons associated with COVID-19, until further notice an additional 30 days will be given in which you should aim to complete the test (that is until 120 days after removal of the last reactor).

Issued on behalf of Christianne Glossop, Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales.

⁵ <http://apha.defra.gov.uk/documents/ov/Briefing-Note-0620.pdf>