



Animal &  
Plant Health  
Agency

## APHA Briefing Note 17/20

# Advice for OVs on a temporary amendment to testing bovine animals under 180 days old in Officially TB-Free herds in England and Wales during the COVID-19 outbreak

Date issued: 04 May 2020 (Updated 07 May 2020)

### Purpose

To provide guidance to Official Veterinarians (OVs) undertaking TB skin testing in England and Wales during the COVID-19 outbreak regarding a temporary amendment allowing bovine animals under 180 days old to be excluded from certain routine and targeted surveillance TB skin tests in Officially TB Free (OTF) herds where they cannot be tested safely in accordance with current public health (social distancing) guidance.

### Background

1. The current APHA advice for OVs undertaking TB skin testing during the COVID-19 outbreak in England and Wales is set out in OV Briefing Notes 12/20 and 14/20 respectively<sup>1</sup>.
2. This advice reflects Defra and Welsh Government's agreed position on TB skin testing of cattle, namely that **TB testing should only be carried out if, in the OV's judgement, it can be done safely in accordance with current COVID-19 public health guidance.**
3. Under the existing 'zero tolerance' policy, if any of the animals eligible for a required surveillance TB test (usually all bovines 42 days old and over) have not been tested by the closing date of the testing window, the test will be considered incomplete. The

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<sup>1</sup> <http://apha.defra.gov.uk/official-vets/briefing%20notes.htm>

affected herd will have its OTF status automatically suspended (OTFS) once the test becomes overdue. APHA will not lift the movement restrictions and restore OTF status until all the eligible animals in the herd have been TB tested with negative results.

4. Defra, Welsh Government and APHA acknowledge the practical difficulties of conducting the tuberculin skin test in youngstock while maintaining the recommended two-metre minimum separation between farmer and tester. The appropriate methods to restrain calves for TB skin testing purposes may be at odds with Government guidance on social distancing.
5. This inability to TB test some young calves in accordance with current public health guidance is leading to some incomplete (part) TB herd tests and the need for OVs to return to the farm to test the youngstock once the public health restrictions have been relaxed or the stock are large enough to be restrained safely in a crush.
6. [APHA OV Briefing Notes](#) 07/20, 12/20 and 14/20 provide guidance to support ongoing visits to farms to safeguard human health as well as animal health and welfare.
7. Analysis of historical data from TB skin testing in Wales and England suggests that a small number of infected herds may not be detected if young stock are not tested. However there are also risks that farmers may choose not to test at all if they are going to be put under restrictions due to the young stock not being able to be tested safely. This could also result in infected animals and breakdowns remaining undetected, with potential further spread within the herd, and to contiguous herds and local wildlife. During the current COVID-19 outbreak, the benefits of this temporary change to encourage the continued testing of most animals outweighs the risks of missing a small number of infected herds where only youngstock are infected. Maintaining pre-movement and post-movement TB testing requirements will help mitigate any increased risks.

## General Principles

8. All calves 42 days old and over should be tested when it is safe to do so in line with current COVID-19 public health (social distancing) guidelines.
9. **However, movement restrictions will not be placed on OTF herds in England and Wales undergoing routine or targeted surveillance TB skin tests if bovine animals under 180 days of age are left untested because, in the OV's judgement, they cannot be handled safely in line with current COVID-19 public health (social distancing) guidelines. This temporary amendment applies as long as all the other eligible (older) animals in the herd have been TB tested with negative results within the relevant testing window.**

10. In relation to other test types in OTF herds, bovine animals 42 days old and over will still require TB skin testing in the following circumstances, but this should only be carried out in accordance with the current guidelines on social distancing:
- if they are intended for export (private pre-export TB testing)
  - if they are identified by APHA as tracings to or from a TB breakdown herd
  - if they have been identified as inconclusive reactors and are awaiting a skin re-test
  - if they are being moved off a holding and that movement normally requires pre-movement TB testing
  - if they require post-movement TB testing after moving to holdings in Scotland, the Low Risk Area in England or Low TB Area in Wales from a holding in an area of higher TB incidence.
11. The APHA Forms Tuberculosis Test Types and Sam Codes: What to use and When - England (TR15(E)) and Tuberculosis Test Types and Sam Codes: What to use and When - Wales (TR15(W)) available in the OV Instructions on the APHA OV Gateway and have been updated accordingly.
12. This temporary amendment of the TB testing instructions can be applied retrospectively to incomplete tests where the final part of the test would have commenced on or after 23 March 2020 and to any qualifying tests from now on, but only where youngstock under 180 days could not be tested due to valid reasons associated with COVID-19.
13. The temporary amendment will be kept under regular review.
14. Further guidance on short interval and check tests in herds that have their OTF status suspended or withdrawn due to a TB breakdown or where lesions typical of TB have been detected at slaughter will be provided in a separate Briefing Note.

## Specific Instructions

15. When submitting results for any test that qualifies for the amendment discussed at paragraphs 8-12 above, OVs should use the iSam 'Not Tested' reason of "*Advised by APHA not to test*" for any eligible bovine animals aged between 42 and 179 days old inclusive which cannot be tested safely while maintaining social distancing requirements. If it is only these eligible bovine animals aged between 42 and 179 days old inclusive that have not been tested, the TB test should be submitted as "complete" on iSAM.
16. APHA expects that, if an OV decides that it is safe to skin test groups of eligible calves under 180 days old, then all the eligible calves in that group should be tested.

17. If reactors are disclosed at a skin test conducted in an OTF herd, any calves under 180 days old unable to be tested while adhering to public health guidance can still be submitted with the “*Advised by APHA not to test*” ‘Not tested’ reason.
18. For any herd tests that qualify for the temporary amendment for which part tests have already been submitted and where only cattle under 180 days old remain untested because social distancing requirements could not be maintained, OV’s will need to process those animals as detailed in paragraphs 15-17 above and submit the test as ‘complete’ on iSam. The TT1 date for those ‘Not tested’ animals should be the same date as the TT1 date(s) for the part test(s) submitted for the tested animals on the same premises. OV’s will not be penalised for late submission of test results in this specific scenario.
19. Other eligible bovine animals that were not tested for other reasons will need to be accounted for as usual, and the “*Advised by APHA not to test*” ‘Not tested’ reason **must not** be used for these animals. APHA will check that all eligible animals have been tested and usual procedures will be followed for incomplete tests.
20. OV’s support in providing clear communications to farmers is essential for smooth implementation of this temporary amendment to the TB testing instructions. OV’s should clearly inform cattle keepers of the following at the end of a test, where applicable:
- this temporary amendment does not apply to pre-movement TB testing. Any untested bovine animals aged 42-179 days old will still require statutory pre-movement testing where applicable i.e. when moving out of an annually (or more frequently) tested herd
  - this temporary amendment does not apply to post-movement TB testing. Any untested bovine animals aged between 42 and 179 days will still require statutory post-movement TB testing where applicable i.e. when moving into the Low Risk Area of England and the Low TB Area of Wales from a higher bTB incidence area
  - any TB test where eligible bovine animals aged **180 days old** and over have not been tested will not be considered complete. The test will become overdue if all eligible animals have not been tested by the end of the testing window, as usual
  - TB tests of the type specified in paragraph 10 above are applicable to bovine animals **42 days old** and over in order to be considered complete
21. Until further notice, for the reporting of short interval or check tests results in herds that have their OTF status suspended or withdrawn due to a TB breakdown or detection of lesions typical of TB at private commercial slaughter, OV’s must not enter a ‘Not tested’ reason on iSam for these animals and should instead submit the results as a part test as usual. As per paragraph 14 above, further instructions will be provided in a separate Briefing Note.

Issued on behalf of Christine Middlemiss UK Chief Veterinary Officer, Christianne Glossop Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales and Andrew Soldan APHA Veterinary Director.