



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency

APHA Briefing Note 19/20

Advice for OVs on TB testing bovine animals under 180 days old in herds with an ongoing TB incident in England and Wales during the **Coronavirus outbreak**

Date issued: 14 May 2020

Purpose

To provide guidance to Official Veterinarians (OVs) undertaking TB skin testing in England and Wales during the Coronavirus outbreak in herds whose Officially TB Free status has been suspended (OTFS) or withdrawn (OTFW) due to a TB incident. A temporary amendment to the TB testing instructions will allow further herd testing to be scheduled even though some or all eligible calves under 180 days old have not been tested. This only applies where these young animals 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 in England and Wales during the Coronavirus outbreak is set out in OV Briefing Notes 12/20, 14/20 and 17/20. 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 public health (social distancing) guidance.
2. Currently, an additional 30 days, on top of the usual 30 day testing window, is allowed for completion of Short Interval and Check tests before testing is considered overdue, in recognition of the extra time likely to be needed to carry out TB tests safely.
3. Defra, Welsh Government and APHA acknowledge the practical difficulties of conducting the tuberculin skin test in youngstock, as appropriate methods to restrain calves for TB skin testing purposes may be at odds with Government guidance on social distancing.

4. APHA OV Briefing Note 17/20 provides guidance to OVs undertaking TB skin testing in England and Wales regarding a temporary amendment allowing bovine animals under 180 days old to be excluded from certain TB skin tests in Officially TB Free (OTF) herds, where they cannot be tested safely in accordance with current public health (social distancing) guidance.

5. There is an increased risk of undetected infection spreading within a herd with a TB incident, and potentially to contiguous herds and local wildlife, when TB testing has stalled because some or all eligible youngstock cannot be tested while adhering to current public health (social distancing) guidelines.

General Principles

6. Normally, in herds with a TB incident where eligible animals remain untested, no further Short Interval tests are scheduled until the test is completed. A temporary dispensation is now in place whereby the next Short Interval test can be scheduled even if eligible youngstock under 180 days old could not be tested safely while adhering to current public health (social distancing) guidelines, as long as all other eligible animals in the herd are tested.

7. There is no change to the policy that, in a herd with a TB incident, all eligible bovine animals, including those under 180 days old, must complete the required number of TB skin tests with negative results before OTF herd status can be restored.

8. In order to restore OTF status and withdraw movement restrictions, herds in the High Risk Area (HRA) and Edge Area of England and herds with OTF status withdrawn (OTFW) in Wales must complete at least two rounds of Short Interval testing with negative results. OTFS herds in Wales are required to complete one, and OTFS herds in the Low Risk Area of England one or more, Short Interval tests before OTF status can be restored. The number of tests and the interpretation usually depends on whether any typical lesions of TB are found and/or *M bovis* is identified in the test reactors or slaughterhouse case(s) that triggered the TB incident.

9. There may also be a requirement to complete supplementary interferon-gamma or antibody blood testing, and the keeper must still confirm completion of cleansing and disinfection.

10. All calves 42 days old and over (or from birth in Wales), should be tested when it is safe to do so in line with current Coronavirus public health (social distancing) guidelines. APHA expects that, if an OV decides that it is safe to skin test a group of eligible calves under 180 days old, then all the eligible calves in that group should be tested.

11. Herds in England and Wales with OTF status suspended (OTFS) due to the detection of typical lesions of TB at routine slaughter are required to have an immediate Check test. In England and Wales, if *M bovis* is identified in the laboratory, further Short Interval

testing can be scheduled even if bovine animals under 180 days old were not included in the immediate Check test due to social distancing requirements. In Wales, restoration of OTF status following negative culture results will be dependent on the satisfactory outcome of a veterinary risk assessment if any bovine animals under 180 days old have not been included in the Check test.

12. 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)) are available in the OV Instructions on the APHA Vet Gateway and have been updated to reflect this amendment.

13. The temporary amendment will be kept under regular review.

Specific Instructions

13. If the TB test discloses reactors and/or inconclusive reactors (IRs), 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 (from birth to 179 days old in Wales) which cannot be tested while adhering to public health (social distancing) guidelines. If these are the only animals not tested, please submit the results in Sam as 'complete'.

14. This 'Not Tested' reason must not be used for other animals. Where eligible bovine animals 180 days old and over cannot be tested safely, OVs should submit the test results as a part test and add a comment to explain this when submitting the results. Other eligible bovine animals that were not tested for other reasons, such as those recently moved off, should be accounted for as usual.

15. If the Short Interval test results are negative, with no reactors or IRs, but eligible bovine animals under 180 days have not been tested due to social distancing requirements, OVs should advise the keeper that the test is incomplete and as such cannot be considered as a test that counts towards restoring OTF status. OVs should discuss if any adjustments or special arrangements can be made to allow safe completion of the test on the younger animals.

- If these are considered feasible to maintain social distancing, the OV should make arrangements to return to the farm to complete the test. The results for the animals already tested should be submitted as a part test in the usual way.
- If there is no realistic prospect of returning soon to complete the test, OVs should enter a comment to that effect and submit the results for the tested animals in the usual way and enter the 'Not tested' reason '*Advised by APHA not to test*' against the eligible animals under 180 days old which could not be tested whilst maintaining social distancing. If these are the only animals not tested, please submit the results in Sam as 'complete'.

16. When eligible animals under 180 days old have been excluded from a test due to the requirement to maintain social distancing, the test will be considered a Check test and further Short Interval testing will be scheduled.

17. When eligible animals under 180 days old have been excluded from a test that, if clear, would make the herd eligible for OTF status, and a 'Not tested' reason has been entered for them, a duplicate work schedule will be created for completion of the test. In Wales, if the releasing Short Interval test has not been completed by 120 days after the TT1 date of the first part of the test, in addition to completing the test on the untested animals under 180 days old, all the previously tested animals will need to be tested again.

18. This temporary amendment to the TB testing instructions is applicable to tests with a testing window that was open on 23 March 2020 or that opened after that date. Where a part test has already been submitted but where eligible bovine animals under 180 day old remain untested due to social distancing requirements, OV's should process these animals as detailed in paragraphs 13-15 above. 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. If these were the only animals not tested, please submit the results in Sam as 'complete'. OV's will not be penalised for late submission of test results in this specific scenario.

19. The support of OV's in providing clear communications to farmers is essential for smooth implementation of this temporary amendment to the TB testing instructions. OV's should clearly advise cattle keepers of the following at the end of a test, where applicable:

- a Short Interval test in which all the eligible bovine animals cannot be tested will be considered incomplete and as such cannot count as a qualifying test for the purposes of restoring OTF herd status
- this temporary amendment does not apply to pre-movement TB testing if animals are being moved off the holding under the authorisation of a licence which requires a pre-movement test (for example, moving from a pCPH to an associated tCPH)
- TB movement restrictions always remain in place until APHA has reviewed the test results and issued a formal notice withdrawing the restriction.

Issued on 14 May 2020