



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency

APHA Briefing Note 19/21

Discontinuing Covid-19 temporary amendments to TB skin testing in GB

Date issued: 28 May 2021

Purpose

To inform Official Veterinarians (OVs) of the **discontinuation** of the Covid-19 temporary amendments to TB testing in GB, namely:

- discontinue from 1 July 2021, suspension of referrals of overdue TB skin tests in GB to the paying agencies due to Covid-19 reasons as a breach under cross compliance legislation.
- discontinue from 1 July, the extension of short interval testing windows by 30 days in England and Wales.
- discontinue from 1 August 2021, the exemption of calves under 180 days old from certain routine and targeted TB skin tests in officially TB free (OTF) herds in England and Wales if they cannot be tested safely in line with social distancing.

In **Wales**, the requirement for pregnancy diagnosis certificate to support valuations of in calf reactor cows will be reinstated from 1st July 2021.

Background

1. The current position on TB testing throughout GB is that it “should only continue if, in the OV’s judgement, it can be done safely in accordance with current Covid-19 public health guidance”.
2. Temporary amendments were introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic to support delivery of statutory TB testing in GB. These amendments reduced the negative impact on TB surveillance and control measures as a result of social distancing and other public health restrictions.

3. Referrals to the paying agencies for overdue TB skin tests are currently suspended for keepers that provide APHA with a Covid-19 reason in GB. Please refer to [previous OV Briefing Notes](#) 12/20, 13/20 and 14/20.

4. In breakdown herds, Short Interval (SI) testing continues to be scheduled with an earliest activity start date 60 days after the last reactor removal, with a testing window set automatically at 30 days. If it is not possible to test within the pre-set window due to reasons associated with Covid-19, in England and Wales an additional 30 days is given to complete the SI test (that is until 120 days after removal of the last reactor).

5. The difficulty of skin testing calves whilst complying with social distancing is recognised by APHA, Defra and Welsh Government. In May 2020, administrations in England and Wales introduced a temporary amendment to enable selected skin tests in OTF herds to be regarded as complete whenever the OV does not consider it safe to test calves under 180 days old. Please refer to OV Briefing Note 17/20.

6. OVs have been applying this temporary amendment sensibly and sparingly and it has enabled completion of skin herd tests that may have otherwise not been completed or abandoned, and thus reduced the number of tests becoming overdue. Any potential negative effects on the sensitivity of the TB surveillance testing regime during this limited period of time are likely to have been minimal.

7. Additionally, TB testing instructions were temporarily amended for TB breakdown herds during the Covid-19 pandemic. The amended instructions allow further herd testing to be scheduled even though some or all eligible calves under 180 days old have not been tested. As for the temporary amendment for OTF herds, this only applies where these young animals cannot be tested safely in accordance with social distancing. Please refer to OV Briefing Note 19/20

What's Changing

1. As the Covid-19 situation is improving in GB and public health restrictions are incrementally lifted, there is no longer a need for these temporary arrangements.

2. The plan is to **resume referrals to the paying agencies for overdue TB skin tests from 1 July 2021**.

- In **England and Scotland**, this will apply to all skin tests already overdue on this date and tests that subsequently become overdue.
- In **Wales**, APHA will be writing to cattle keepers, who have previously received an overdue test letter, with a new date for test completion, as was indicated in the letter. For herd tests this will be two months after the date on the letter and for individual animal tests this will be one month. The keeper will be referred to the Rural Payments Wales (RPW), if the test has not been completed by the new date. From now on, normal overdue procedures will apply, with any test newly becoming overdue after the 1st July being referred to the RPW.

3. In England and Wales, **no additional time will be allowed to complete SI tests with windows ending on or after 1 July 2021.**

4. With the return to the normal overdue testing processes, any cattle keeper who has extenuating circumstances that prevents them from completing their TB test should contact APHA as a matter of urgency prior to the test window closing. This was always an option available pre-Covid.

5. The temporary amendment exempting calves under 180 days old from surveillance TB testing will be discontinued in both England and Wales from 1 August 2021, a month after reinstating referrals of overdue TB tests to the paying agencies. The intention of this staggered approach is to give industry and OVs time to plan and adapt.

6. As a result of this, **calves under 180 days old cannot be exempted from surveillance, or control (breakdown tests) skin tests where TT1 of the final (or only) part of the test is on or after 1 August 2021.** Skin tests will need to include all eligible animals, including calves under 180 days old in order to be considered complete. Any incomplete test that becomes overdue will be subject to normal overdue testing procedures, including referral to paying agencies.

7. The Covid-19 guidance on the TB hub website has been updated in line with these changes.

8. In **Wales**, the requirement for pregnancy diagnosis certificate to support valuations of in calf reactor cows will recommence from 1st July 2021.

More Information

1. Covid-19 guidance on the TB Hub <https://tbhub.co.uk/tb-testing-and-control-measures-in-cattle-in-gb-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>