



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency

APHA Briefing Note 24/21

Refinement to the interferon-gamma testing policy in the High Risk and Edge Areas of England

Date issued: 22 June 2021

Purpose

1. To inform Official Veterinarians that from 12 July 2021, the interferon-gamma (IFN-y) testing policy for TB breakdown herds in England is changing.

Background

2. Use of the supplementary IFN-y test was increased in 2017 in TB breakdown herds in the High Risk Area (HRA) of England following a public consultation.
3. In 2018 the Godfray review of the government's strategy for achieving officially TB free (OTF) status for England highlighted the need to use more sensitive diagnostic methods, such as the IFN-y test, in a more targeted way.
4. In the government response to the Godfray review published in March 2020, Defra committed to reviewing the IFN-y testing policy in England and a public consultation was launched in January 2021.
5. As set out in the government response to the recent consultation, APHA is implementing changes to the IFN-y testing policy in the HRA and Edge Area of England.

Implementation of changes to IFN-y testing policy in England

6. From 12 July 2021, the IFN-y testing policy in the HRA and Edge Area is changing as follows. A comparison of the current and new policies is contained in a table in the Annex.

7. In the HRA, any new TB breakdown herd with lesion and/or culture positive animals will be subject to a mandatory IFN-γ test if: *The breakdown occurred within 18 months of the herd regaining OTF status following a previous breakdown with lesion and/or culture positive animals.*
8. Mandatory IFN-γ testing of new breakdowns with lesion and/or culture positive animals in badger control areas that have completed at least two annual rounds of effective licensed badger culling will be discontinued.
9. For TB breakdown herds that do not meet the criterion in paragraph 7 for mandatory IFN-γ testing, APHA can apply discretionary testing following veterinary assessment of the case.
10. In the Edge Area, all new TB breakdown herds with lesion and/or culture positive animals in the **annual** surveillance testing parts will continue to be subject to a mandatory IFN-γ test.
11. All new TB breakdown herds with lesion and/or culture positive animals in the **six-monthly** surveillance testing parts of the Edge Area will be assessed against the criterion in paragraph 7 as for herds in the HRA. If a herd satisfies the criterion then it will be subject to a mandatory IFN-γ test.
12. The IFN-γ testing policy in the Low Risk Area (LRA) will remain the same i.e. all new TB breakdowns with lesion and/or culture positive animals will be subject to a mandatory IFN-γ test.
13. Herds with a persistent TB breakdown (those reaching 18 months under movement restrictions) in England will continue to be subject to a mandatory IFN-γ test.
14. Discretionary IFN-γ testing will continue to be applied by APHA in certain situations where a TB breakdown herd is not automatically subject to mandatory IFN-γ testing, for example in breakdowns with high numbers of reactor animals. IFN-γ testing is also used by APHA in other ad hoc scenarios such as informing decisions about partial or whole herd slaughter for TB control reasons.

Relevant documents

15. None for PVSs/OVs

Further information

16. Detailed Q&A on the changes to IFN-γ testing in England is available on the TB hub website <https://tbhub.co.uk/tb-policy/england/refinements-to-the-interferon-gamma-testing-policy-in-the-high-risk-and-edge-area-of-england/>

17. The government response to the Godfray review of Defra’s bTB eradication strategy for England can be accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-strategy-for-achieving-bovine-tuberculosis-free-status-for-england-2018-review-government-response>

18. The government response to the recent public consultation on further measures to eradicate bTB in England can be accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/bovine-tuberculosis-proposals-to-help-eradicate-disease-in-england>

Contact APHA

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Annex

Mandatory testing	Current policy	New policy
HRA	<p>Breakdowns with lesion and/or culture positive animals which meet the following criteria:</p> <p>Criterion 1 – herds where the most likely source of infection determined by the APHA investigation was cattle related e.g. cattle movements, contiguous infection, recrudescence.</p> <p>Criterion 2 – herds located in a badger control area that has completed at least two annual rounds of effective licensed badger culling.</p> <p>Criterion 3 – chronic and persistent breakdowns.</p>	<p>New breakdowns with lesion and/or culture positive animals which meet the following criterion:</p> <p><i>The breakdown occurred within 18 months of the herd regaining OTF status following a previous breakdown with lesion and/or culture positive animals.</i></p> <p>Chronic and persistent breakdowns with lesion and/or culture positive animals.</p>
Edge Area	<p>All new breakdowns with lesion and/or culture positive animals</p> <p>Chronic and persistent breakdowns</p>	<p>New breakdowns with lesion and/or culture positive animals in six-monthly surveillance testing parts which meet the following criterion:</p>

	with lesion and/or culture positive animals.	<p><i>The breakdown occurred within 18 months of the herd regaining OTF status following a previous breakdown with lesion and/or culture positive animals.</i></p> <p>All new breakdowns with lesion and/or culture positive animals in annual surveillance testing parts.</p> <p>Chronic and persistent breakdowns with lesion and/or culture positive animals.</p>
LRA	<p>All new breakdowns with lesion and/or culture positive animals.</p> <p>Chronic and persistent breakdowns with lesion and/or culture positive animals.</p>	No change