



Guidance on Sample Collection from Poultry Health Scheme Flocks and for Poultry Export Purposes

In 2006, Defra made changes to the procedures for testing Poultry Health Scheme (PHS) member flocks for *Salmonella* (CIN GEN/06/341(PH29)). These changes were a 'knock-on' effect from the new zoonosis testing procedures which took effect on 1 January 2007.

It is necessary for veterinary surgeons to be involved in sample collection in order to vouch for the 'chain of evidence' from the sampling of the birds through to the issue of the laboratory report.

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) has been consulted and the following advice is based upon their opinion. Veterinary Surgeons (VS) may observe that, in certain cases, the degree of veterinary involvement in sampling procedures may be greater than has sometimes been the practice in the past.

Legal Position

The Poultry Health Scheme (PHS) implements the EU requirements for trade between Member States, Directive 2009/158/EC and the *Salmonella* and *Mycoplasma* tests are an essential part of those requirements.

As these are official tests for export purposes, it is necessary for sample collection to be carried out by, or under the direction of, an appropriate official such as a VS, and for testing to be carried out in an officially approved laboratory. A list of laboratories approved for this purpose is published on the Defra website. The current list can be found at PH28. As the list is subject to change it is advised that the laboratory be contacted before sending samples.

The Directing Veterinarian Surgeon (DVS) or Veterinary Head of Field Delivery (VHoFD) is personally responsible for the 'chain of evidence' between the collection of the sample on site and the laboratory test result. DVS's will be required to provide a written statement to the VHoFD certifying that samples have been correctly collected and submitted to the laboratory. An initial statement is required which must then be repeated at annual intervals.

RCVS Advice

The certification subcommittee of the RCVS has advised that certification could be valid only if one of the following options are met:

- the VS took the samples personally, or
- the VS observed the samples being taken, or
- the VS 'received the samples and submitted them for testing having been taken by staff directly under his/her control and according to a standard procedure the staff had been trained and tested to follow.'

The committee also commented that: 'it must be clear to all parties what the acceptable procedures are, this being done either on the certificate or on the accompanying guidance notes'.

Protocol for Collection 'Under the Control'

The DVS must draw up a written set of instructions for the non veterinary collection staff (the team) to follow. Each member of the collection team must be provided with a copy, or a copy must be kept in an easily accessible place where every member of the team can consult it.

The DVS must personally talk through the written protocol with each member of the team. This may be done with the team as a group, but must be repeated individually with any new members who join the team.

The written protocol must specify sample collection procedures:

- the basis on which each flock will be selected for sampling, and who (e.g. DVS or team leader) will be responsible for deciding when a flock must be sampled
- the number of samples to be collected from each flock
- the type of samples to be collected from each flock
- the method by which the samples will be collected
- how the samples will be handled and stored to maintain their viability prior to despatch.

The written protocol must specify the recording procedures:

- a record sheet must be maintained for each PHS member flock to show when, for what, and by whom the flock has been sampled
- it must be stated whether individual sampled birds are to be identified, and if so, what method of identification
- it must be stated how each individual sample is to be identified; the identification must be traceable to the flock, and may also be traceable to the individual bird.

The written protocol must describe the laboratory submission procedures:

- the laboratory that will test the samples must be specified for each type of sample
- the correct laboratory submission form must be specified
- a person must be designated as responsible for completing the laboratory submission form
- the essential details to be recorded on the laboratory submission form must be specified; they must include identification of the flock, and individual sample identifications.

Role of the Veterinary Surgeon

Sample collection must be the responsibility of a veterinary surgeon. It is not necessary for the veterinary surgeon to be an Official Veterinarian (OV), but they must have the qualification of MRCVS or FRCVS.

A veterinary surgeon may be acting on behalf of the PHS member in one of the following capacities:

- the PHS member may be a company which employs its own full time veterinarian
- the PHS member may retain a consultant private veterinarian to provide veterinary services on a periodic or occasional basis
- the PHS member may employ a private veterinarian specifically to manage the sample collection.

Sample collection may also be carried out by staff of the sample testing laboratory, provided that they are acting under the direction of the laboratory's staff veterinary surgeon on the same terms as above.

Arrangements for sample collection by Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) staff are still subject to discussion and have not yet been confirmed. It is possible that the VHoFD may arrange for samples to be collected by officers working for APHA. In this case, any non-veterinary APHA staff would be acting under the direction of the VHoFD on the same terms as above.

Sample collection visits may be timed to coincide with visits which a veterinary surgeon is making for any other purpose, such as:

- annual re-inspection visit for membership of the PHS
- routine flock health advisory visit
- routine health advisory visit to a hatchery
- specific flock or hatchery visits for other health or welfare issues
- sample collection visit to a flock under the relevant **Control of Salmonella in Poultry Orders**

All the above provisions apply equally to both *Salmonella* and *Mycoplasma* sample collection for the PHS

All the above provisions also apply to any poultry export health testing which requires Veterinary certification.