Q&A - Setting Routine TB Testing Intervals in 2019 (England)

The current Tuberculosis (TB) surveillance testing strategy, explained in more detail below, was introduced in England on 1 January 2013.

Q1. Are there any changes to the TB testing intervals in England for 2019?
The only change will be that with effect from May 2019 cattle herds in the six monthly testing parts of the Edge Area will be eligible for annual surveillance testing if they meet either of the following criteria:

- the herd has been in existence for at least six years and has not had a TB breakdown in that six year period. A single break from keeping cattle of less than four months during the six year period is permitted
- the herd is registered to a bovine TB health scheme accredited under the Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHeCS) at level 1 or above.

Q2. Why has this change been introduced in the six monthly testing part of the Edge Area?
This change recognises and rewards those cattle keepers with a reduced risk of suffering a TB breakdown and/or who are proactively trying to increase their resilience to bovine TB by participating in a CHeCS accredited bovine TB health scheme. It will also help to incentivise other keepers to reduce the bovine TB threat to their herds.

For more details on this change, including a Q&A, refer to http://www.tbhub.co.uk/.

Q3. What are the current testing Intervals?
TB testing intervals are based on the level of disease risk and since 1 January 2018 the default routine TB testing interval in the three TB risk areas of England are:

- Edge Area:
  - six monthly testing in Cheshire, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and parts¹ of Derbyshire (West), Berkshire (West) and Hampshire (North West). With effect from May 2019 cattle herds in the six monthly testing part of the Edge Area will be eligible for annual surveillance testing if they meet either of the following criteria:
    - the herd has been in existence for at least six years and has not had a TB breakdown in that six year period. A single break from keeping cattle of less than four months during the six year period is permitted
    - the herd is registered to a bovine TB health scheme accredited under the Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHeCS) at level 1 or above
  - annual and radial testing in Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex and the remaining parts¹ of Derbyshire, Berkshire and Hampshire
- High Risk Area: annual testing
- Low Risk Area: four-yearly and radial testing

Q4. Are some herds in the Low Risk Area on more frequent surveillance testing?
Yes. Herds considered to be at a higher TB risk because of management practices (bull hire herds, heifer rearing herds, producer retailers of raw drinking milk, regular purchasers of animals from high incidence countries and the endemic areas in England and Wales) are placed on annual testing. Herds undergoing post breakdown testing or enhanced TB surveillance i.e. contiguous, radial or TB hotspot (East Cumbria) testing are also placed on more frequent testing.

Cattle moving out of annually or six monthly TB tested herds in the four yearly testing area also require compulsory pre-movement testing, subject to some exceptions i.e. open farms, producers/retailers of raw milk, etc.

Q5. Is there enhanced surveillance around TB breakdowns in the Low Risk and Edge Areas?
Yes, annual testing in Edge Area and four yearly testing in the LRA will be supplemented with radial testing to check for spread to neighbouring cattle herds within a 3km radius of TB breakdown herds with lesion and/or culture positive animals.

¹ The list of parishes on six-monthly and annual testing in the counties of Derbyshire, Berkshire and Hampshire can be found on the 2019 Testing Intervals site on GOV.UK
Additional controls are also used to prevent the establishment of new TB ‘hotspots’ e.g. if/when clusters of TB breakdowns are disclosed. We continue to review the TB situation and discuss more widely with the industry other ways of protecting the four yearly testing area from the risk of TB.

Q6. Are some TB breakdowns also subject to interferon gamma blood testing?
Yes, all herds in the LRA and Edge Areas affected by lesion and/or culture-positive TB breakdowns are subject to interferon gamma testing. In the HRA this test is applied more selectively in certain herds with lesion and/or culture-positive breakdowns that satisfy a number of criteria.

For more information refer to: http://www.tbhub.co.uk/guidance/testing-and-compensation/cattle-interferon-gamma-ifn%ce%b3-testing-bovine-tuberculosis/

Q7. How often will the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) review herds that are eligible for annual surveillance testing in six-monthly testing parts of the Edge Area?
APHA will update the eligibility lists every six months in July and January each year using data as of the end of the previous April and October respectively. The updates will result in some herds becoming eligible (when they reach six years OTF or level 1 or above CHeCS accreditation), but also some herds losing eligibility due to having a TB breakdown or prolonged/multiple breaks from keeping cattle.

Q8. Will APHA alter the herd testing interval in six monthly testing areas during the year in between six-monthly reviews?
For herds qualifying under the CHeCS criterion only (at level 1 or above), cattle keepers can contact APHA any time during the year as soon as their herd becomes eligible, and their herd testing interval will be amended from six-monthly to annual. Herd testing intervals will not be amended between the six-monthly eligibility checks for those herds qualifying under the six years OTF criterion only.

Q9. Will APHA still retain the discretion to alter the herd testing interval in annual and four-yearly testing areas during the year?
Yes, but normally only to increase the testing frequency, e.g. in response to an unexpected and significant rise in the number of TB breakdowns in parts of the four yearly testing area or on the basis of individual herd risk.

Q10. Will I be notified of my Testing Interval (TI) and Herd Testing Interval (HTI)?
Statement letters will only be sent to cattle keepers if/when their TB testing interval has changed. The reasons for the change will be explained.

Q11. What if my TB Testing Delivery Partner or Official Veterinarian (OV) cannot complete my test on time or carry out my pre-movement test?
If you encounter any problems in arranging a test, please contact APHA via the Defra Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301. The Helpline is open Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm.

APHA is an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and also works on behalf of the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Food Standards Agency to safeguard animal and plant health for the benefit of people, the environment and the economy.