



Q&A - Setting Routine Surveillance TB Testing Intervals in 2021 (England)

Updated May 2021

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 2021?

Yes, from 1 July 2021, default six-monthly surveillance testing of cattle herds will be extended to **all parts of the High Risk Area (HRA) of England**, following its initial introduction in the counties of Staffordshire and Shropshire in September 2020. Refer to the TB Hub for more details on this policy change:

<https://tbhub.co.uk/tb-policy/england/six-monthly-surveillance-testing-of-cattle-herds-in-the-high-risk-area/>

As previously, some cattle herds will be eligible to remain on 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 (including breakdowns where no lesion and/or culture positive animals were disclosed). 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 CHECS at level 1 or above

Q2. Why has this change been introduced?

Increasing the frequency of surveillance testing in the HRA from annual to six-monthly will help detect TB-infected herds at an earlier stage. This reduces the time the TB bacterium can spread within the herd, be transmitted to other herds and wildlife, and spread in the environment. Six-monthly surveillance testing also allows APHA to reduce the number of ad hoc, unpredictable TB tests such as tracing and contiguous tests. Moving to six-monthly surveillance testing is in line with the conclusions of the Godfray review¹ of Defra's bTB eradication strategy for England, which suggested that the sensitivity of surveillance testing needs to be increased in higher risk herds to find disease earlier.

Q3. What are the current TB testing intervals in England?

Surveillance TB testing intervals are based on bovine TB risk. The default routine testing intervals in the three bovine TB risk areas of England are:

- High Risk Area: six-monthly surveillance testing from 1 July 2021
- Edge Area:
 - Six-monthly surveillance testing in Cheshire, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and parts² of Derbyshire (West), Berkshire (West) and Hampshire (North West)
 - annual surveillance testing supplemented with radial testing around lesion and/or culture positive TB breakdowns in Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex and the remaining parts² of Derbyshire, Berkshire and Hampshire
- Low Risk Area (LRA): four-yearly surveillance testing and radial testing around lesion and/or culture positive TB breakdowns

Q4. Will some herds in the HRA and six-monthly testing parts of the Edge Area be subject to less frequent surveillance testing?

Yes, some cattle herds in the HRA and 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 (including breakdowns where no lesion and/or culture positive animals were disclosed). 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 licensed by CHECS and accredited at level one or above

¹ [Bovine TB Strategy Review October 2018](#)

² The list of parishes on six-monthly and annual testing in the counties of Derbyshire, Berkshire and Hampshire can be found on the [2021 Testing Intervals site on GOV.UK](#)

Q5. Are some herds in the LRA 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 or more frequent testing.

Herds undergoing post breakdown testing or enhanced TB surveillance i.e. contiguous, radial or TB hotspot (e.g. East Cumbria) testing are also placed on more frequent testing.

Cattle moving out of annually or more frequently TB tested herds in the LRA also require compulsory pre-movement testing, subject to some exemptions i.e. open farm herds, producers/retailers of raw milk, etc. that are on annual testing only for public health reasons.

Q6. Is there enhanced surveillance around TB breakdowns in the Low Risk and Edge Areas?

Yes. Annual testing parts of the Edge Area and the four-yearly testing LRA are supplemented with radial testing to check for spread to neighbouring cattle herds within a 3km radius of lesion and/or culture positive TB breakdown herds. Additional controls are also used to prevent the establishment of new TB 'hotspots' e.g. if/when clusters of TB breakdowns are disclosed.

Q7. Are some TB breakdowns also subject to gamma-interferon blood testing?

Yes, all herds in the LRA and Edge Area affected by lesion and/or culture-positive TB breakdowns are subject to mandatory 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:

<https://tbhub.co.uk/tb-testing-cattle/blood-testing/interferon-gamma-blood-testing-of-cattle/>

Q8. How often will the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) review herds that are eligible for annual surveillance testing in the HRA and 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 Officially Tuberculosis Free (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.

Q9. 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 one 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.

Q10. 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.

Q11. 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.

Q12. 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 by telephoning 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.