



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency

APHA Briefing Note 23/24

TB Skin Testing in Wales: Advice for OVs on the TB skin testing policy amendments in Wales from June 2024.

Date issued: 11 June 2024

Purpose

To inform Official Veterinarians (OV) and Approved Tuberculin Testers (ATT) undertaking TB skin testing in Wales, of the amendments being implemented from June 2024 to some TB skin testing policies.

Background

1. The Welsh Government has reconsidered the policy approach to skin testing of specified groups of animals. Our changes are in response to industry feedback regarding the burden and anxieties of testing and should simplify procedures without significantly increasing the risk of disease spread. Such changes should also reduce the resources required around testing and be cost-effective in the longer-term.

Further details on the reasons for each testing requirement change are included below:

- **Calves under 42 days in a TB incident** – reactors are rarely identified in this age group. This may be, in part, due to the variable period of time for a delayed hypersensitivity reaction to tuberculin to appear after infection with *M.bovis*, one to nine weeks, but for most animals three to six weeks (R. de la Rua-Domenech et al, 2005). Occasionally groups of young calves fed raw milk from a cow with a tuberculous udder are identified, but these should also be identified in calves older than 42 days, or at the next Short Interval Tests (SIT).
- **Routine surveillance testing in Approved Finishing Units (AFUs), or Licensed Finishing Units (LFUs)** – these are indoor biosecure units, where

cattle can only move to another AFU (from an AFU), a slaughter gathering, or directly to slaughter. Slaughterhouse post-mortem surveillance provides protection to the food chain. Pre-movement testing is a requirement for LFUs. A reduction in testing costs, it is hoped, will encourage the setting up of more AFUs in Wales.

- **Skin testing after a slaughterhouse case (SLH) in a non-breakdown herd** – the likelihood of an incident herd being identified by check testing, when the PCR test of the slaughterhouse case is negative, is low. However, the likelihood of an incident being identified this way may not be significantly greater than identifying an incident through random additional check testing.

2. Immediate changes to some of the current TB testing arrangements in Wales are, therefore, being made to:

- Animal eligibility for inclusion in SIT, Check Tests (Investigation & Intervention) (CT(I-I)) and Check Tests (Exposure Mitigation) (CT(EM));
- routine surveillance testing requirements in AFUs and LFUs;
- skin testing after a slaughterhouse case in a non-breakdown herd

3. The relevant OV Instructions and APHA Form TR15(W) - Tuberculosis Test Types and Sam Codes: What to Use and When - Wales available on the APHA OV Gateway will be updated accordingly in due course.

4. Updates to the automated Sam Test Notification Letters for keepers and the iSam functionality regarding the eligibility of calves for testing will be implemented in due course.

What are the Changes and Action Required?

1. TB Skin Testing of Calves under 42 days old

- All Short Interval Tests (SIT), Check Tests (Investigation & Intervention) (CT(I-I)) and Check Tests (Exposure Mitigation) (CT(EM)) with a TT1 date on or after 15th June 2024, will no longer require calves under 42 days old to be tested by default.
- Exceptionally, APHA can request calves under 42 days old to be tested where there is an epidemiological risk of infection within this age group. APHA will inform OVs/ATTs when this is required.
- When submitting results for any of these tests, testers should use the iSam 'Not Tested' reason of "Not Eligible for this test" for any bovine animals aged under 42 days at TT1 of the SIT, CT(I-I) or CT(EM) listed in the CTS download. If it is only these bovine animals that have not been tested, the TB test should be submitted as "complete" on iSam.
- Other eligible bovine animals that were not tested for other reasons will need to be accounted for as usual, and the appropriate 'Not Tested' reason must be used

for these animals. APHA will check that all eligible animals have been tested and follow usual procedures for incomplete tests.

- For any herd tests where part tests with a TT1 date before 15th June 2024 have already been submitted and where only calves under 42 days old at an SIT, CT(I-I) or CT(EM) remain untested, testers will need to process those animals on iSam with a 'Not Tested' reason of 'Not Eligible for this test' and submit the test as 'complete' on iSam with the same TT1 date as the part test(s) submitted for the tested animals on the same premises; testers will not be penalised for late submission of test results in this specific scenario.
- The support of testers in providing clear communications to farmers is essential for smooth implementation of this new policy. Testers should clearly inform cattle keepers:
 - any SIT, CT(I-I) or CT(EM) will not be considered complete where bovine animals aged 42 days old and over at the TT1 date, have not been tested.
 - these tests will become overdue if all eligible animals have not been tested by the end of the testing window, as usual.
 - any untested bovine animals aged 42 days old or over will still require statutory pre- movement testing unless the movement is exempt.
 - any untested bovine animals aged 42 days old or over will still require statutory post-movement TB testing where applicable e.g. when moving into the Intermediate TB Area from the High TB Area of Wales or the High Risk Area of England.

2. TB Skin Testing in Approved Finishing Units (AFUs) and Licensed Finishing Units (LFUs)

- All routine 6 monthly TB skin testing in AFUs and LFUs will cease. The TB test type and iSam code for these tests is 'TB Unit' test (TBU).
- All routine 6 monthly TBU tests already scheduled on iSam with an Earliest Activity Start Date (EASD) date of 15th June 2024 or later will be cancelled and removed by APHA from your iSam Workbasket.
- Routine TBU tests already arranged to take place with a TT1 date on or after 15th June 2024 must not be conducted and will be removed by APHA from your iSam Workbasket.
- APHA will write to all operators of AFUs and LFUs in Wales to inform them that routine testing is no longer required.
- TB Breakdown testing in AFUs (90 day TBU tests) and LFUs (SIT testing) will continue as per current procedures.
- APHA will still have the discretion to instruct an immediate Check Test(CT(I&I)) in any AFU or LFU, in any situation considered as high risk.

3. TB Skin Testing after a slaughterhouse (SLH) case

- The requirement to conduct an immediate TB Check Test (CT(I&I)) after a slaughterhouse case in an Officially Tuberculosis Free (OTF) herd or an AFU or

LFU, will cease by default for all SLH cases reported to APHA Wales on or after 8th June 2024.

- In instances, where the PCR test (or bacterial culture) is positive for the SLH case, the first SIT will be instructed at least 60 days from the SLH case leaving the farm.
- CT(I&I)s that are already scheduled on iSam will need to be completed.
- APHA will still have the discretion to request an immediate CT(I&I) in any situation considered as higher risk.
- This is for information only, no action is required.

4. Tracing Tests

- Instructions will only be issued to test animals traced from VL and/or PCR/culture positive breakdowns.

Further Information

1. Please refer any queries to APHA.CymruWales@apha.gov.uk

Reference

1. Ante-mortem diagnosis of tuberculosis in cattle: A review of the tuberculin tests, γ -interferon assay and other diagnostic tests - R. de la Rua-Domenech et al, Research in Veterinary Science 81 (2006) 190-210