



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Scottish
Government
Riaghaltas
na h-Alba



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Date: 16/10/23

Dear organisation,

ADVICE TO VETERINARY SURGEONS ON BRUCELLA CANIS

We are writing to outline our recommendations in relation to *Brucella canis*, which we recognise is an emerging issue for UK pets, owners and of course the veterinary profession. The recommended actions in this letter are advisory and voluntary, pending further evidence gathering and assessment to inform appropriate policy changes.

Canine brucellosis is an infectious disease of dogs that is caused mainly by the bacteria, *Brucella canis*. Historically the UK has been free of *Brucella canis*, but we are seeing increasing numbers of cases linked to the importation of dogs. *Brucella canis* is a zoonotic pathogen and, while the reported cases of the infection in people are rare, it is likely that some groups of people, such as children under the age of 5, elderly people, and those with compromised immune systems, may experience more severe symptoms if they become infected.

Those who deal with imported dogs of unknown provenance, or breeding dogs which may have contact with imported dogs, may be more at risk of exposure to *Brucella canis*. Our most recent assessment of the risks posed by *Brucella canis*, has been published by the Human Animal Infection and Risk Surveillance (HAIRS) group and is available at [Human Animal Infections and Risk Surveillance group \(HAIRS\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/human-animal-infection-and-risk-surveillance). The assessment confirms that although the risk to the wider population is very low, in cases where there is close contact with an infected dog, the likelihood of exposure and consequence increases. We will continue to work with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and provide further updates as appropriate.

Infection in dogs may not result in obvious clinical signs or may cause a range of clinical signs of varying severity. These can include reproductive signs such as abortion, infertility and weak puppies, discospondylitis, lameness, muscle weakness, lymphadenopathy and non-specific signs such as lethargy and weight loss.

Disease due to infection of dogs with *Brucella canis* is not notifiable but detection of the presence of the pathogen was made reportable under amendments to the Zoonoses Order 1989 in 2021. By doing so, we have been able to monitor the number of identified suspect cases to identify if there is evidence of a wider problem of ongoing transmission within the UK dog population, and we are confident this is still mostly a problem associated with imported dogs used for breeding.

To help improve the understanding of the disease amongst veterinary professionals, the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) have created a Summary Information Sheet [Canine-Brucellosis-Summary.pdf \(defra.gov.uk\)](https://www.defra.gov.uk/files/st0123/canine-brucellosis-summary.pdf) covering further information, including the management of the infection. Some veterinary organisations have also produced guidance on this disease.

Diagnosis: we recommend that for dogs under your care you take samples for testing, when there are obvious and specific clinical signs that raise suspicion of canine brucellosis, particularly with a history of import or close association with imported dogs.

For more specific information on recommended testing, please see our frequently asked questions document attached. This includes information on how to submit samples to the APHA laboratory for testing, including from abroad, as well as test costs and diagnostic specificity and sensitivity values.

Our National Reference Laboratory for *Brucella canis* is the APHA laboratory at Weybridge. **For detection of *Brucella canis* infection, we recommend that both serological tests *Brucella canis* SAT (TC1032) and *Brucella canis* iELISA (TC0116) are undertaken.** If either test is positive, then the sample is considered serologically positive. If both tests are negative, then the sample is considered serologically negative. The diagnostic value of some other tests such as lateral flow tests has not yet been verified by the National Reference Laboratory (APHA Weybridge).

Treatment: unfortunately, there is no consistently effective treatment protocol for canine brucellosis. The only way to completely eliminate the risk of transmission of canine brucellosis is by euthanasia of the infected animals. Where owners do not wish to carry out euthanasia, we recommend that risk reduction steps are undertaken for positive animals to mitigate the risk of spread to other animals, owners and veterinary personnel handling these animals.

- Minimise contact of positive animals with other dogs and people to reduce likelihood of exposure of people and other animals to high levels of bacteria.
- Avoid breeding of positive animals and consider neutering.
- Use of effective PPE by veterinary personnel when handling or undertaking procedures on infected dogs.
- Antimicrobial treatment must also be considered, particularly before surgery, noting that antibiotic treatment may reduce the risk of spread of infection but will not clear *Brucella canis* infection.

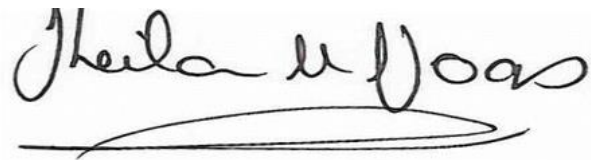
We will be writing to prospective dog owners and organisations considering the importation of puppies and dogs, or when purchasing a previously imported dog as well as dog breeders, to seek veterinary advice and consider the testing of dogs prior to breeding and deciding to import or rehome in the UK. We would be very grateful if you could also advise any prospective breeder, rehoming organisation or individuals to screen animals for infection with *Brucella canis* before making the decision to import or rehome in the UK.

Thank you for your help and continued support with this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Christine Middlemiss CB
UK Chief Veterinary Officer



SHEILA VOAS

Chief Veterinary Officer (Scotland)



Meddyg Richard Irvine
MRCVS
Prif Swyddog Milfeddygol
Llywodraeth Cymru

Dr Richard Irvine MRCVS
Chief Veterinary Officer
Welsh Government