Setting routine TB Testing Intervals in 2018 (England)

November 2017

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 2018?

Yes. From 1 January 2018 all the counties which previously spanned the Edge Area and High Risk Area (HRA) will fall wholly into the Edge Area. As a result of this policy change, introduced following a consultation in 2016, herds in Cheshire, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and parts of Derbyshire (West), Berkshire (West) and Hampshire (North West) will be placed on six-monthly surveillance testing. All other Edge Area counties and part counties will remain on annual testing supplemented with 3km radial testing around lesion and/or culture positive TB breakdowns.

Q2. How will these changes help control bovine TB in the Edge Area?

Our starting point in reviewing our interventions in the Edge Area is our ambition to achieve OTF status for the counties that make up this Area as soon as possible. We aim to obtain OTF (Officially Tuberculosis Free) status for the Low Risk Area (LRA) in 2018, and hope to extend the OTF area further south and west – county by county - from the middle of the next decade onwards. Applying a more sensitive testing regime – and using ‘county’ as the administrative unit for testing purposes - supports that ambition.

Incorporating the current HRA parts of split counties fully into the Edge Area will mean that herds in these counties with higher levels of bovine TB will be subject to the new enhanced surveillance testing regime. Additionally mandatory interferon gamma blood testing will apply to TB breakdown herds with lesion and/or culture positive animals.

Six monthly testing in Edge Area counties with higher levels of bovine TB aims to identify infected herds earlier and reduce the risk of TB spreading. The enhanced surveillance and control measures in the Edge Area protect other cattle herds and prevent the establishment of new infection in badgers in the Edge Area.

Q3. What are the current testing Intervals?

TB testing intervals are based on the level of disease risk.

From 1 January 2018 the default routine TB testing interval in the three TB risk areas of England will be:
Edge Area: six-monthly testing in Cheshire, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and parts\(^1\) of Derbyshire (West), Berkshire (West) and Hampshire (North West).

Annual and radial testing in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex and the remaining parts\(^1\) of Derbyshire, Berkshire and Hampshire.

High Risk Area i.e. the South West of England and the West Midlands: annual testing.

Low Risk Area i.e. the South East, East and North of the country: four-yearly and radial testing.

**Q4. Are some herds in the Low Risk Area on a 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 (contiguous or radial 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 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.

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 Low Risk 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 or culture-positive breakdowns that satisfy a number of criteria.

For more information see:

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\(^1\) The list of parishes on six-monthly and annual testing in the counties of Derbyshire, Berkshire and Hampshire can be found on the 2018 Testing Intervals site at the GOV.UK website.
Q7. Will I be notified of my Testing Interval (TI) and Herd Testing Interval (HTI)?

Yearly 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.

Q8. Will APHA still retain the discretion to alter the testing interval 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.

Q9. 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.