

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Changes to TB cattle movement controls – removal of the common land pre-movement testing exemption

Bovine TB information note 01/14 - update

April 2014

Contents

Introduction	1
What's changing?	1
What will cattle owners need to do and when?	1
Q&A	2

Note – this update provides additional guidance on post-movement testing in question 7

Introduction

Bovine tuberculosis (TB) is one of the most significant problems affecting animal health and sustainable farming in England. It is a chronic infectious disease of cattle caused by *Mycobacterium bovis* (*M. bovis*). While cattle are particularly susceptible, *M. bovis* can infect other mammals too.

This measure builds on changes made in 2012 and 2013 to TB cattle controls and is consistent with the “Strategy for Achieving ‘Officially Bovine Tuberculosis-Free’ Status for England”. The aim of the Strategy, published on 3rd April 2014, is to achieve Official bovine TB Free (OTF) Status for England within 25 years, whilst maintaining a sustainable livestock industry.

What’s changing?

Pre-movement testing of cattle for TB has been in place in England since 2006 to improve TB surveillance and to help detect infected cattle before they move and spread the disease to other herds. There is currently an exemption from pre-movement testing for movements of cattle to and from common land.

From 30 June 2014, the default will be that all cattle aged over 42 days of age moving to and from common land in the annual testing area must be pre-movement tested.

For movements back from the common, farmers can carry out a post-movement test instead to reflect the fact that in most cases, TB testing on common land is impractical and dangerous.

AHVLA will consider licensing some cattle movements without pre-movement testing where veterinary judgement is that an agreed TB “control plan” for the whole common gives at least the same level of assurance as testing would provide. Defra is encouraging commoners associations to work with AHVLA to set up these local plans

What will cattle owners need to do and when?

All cattle keepers with common land rights and annually tested herds should familiarise themselves with this change. Further information will be available from local AHVLA offices and the AHVLA website (details below). You are advised to think ahead about when you plan to move cattle and give your Local Veterinary Practice plenty of notice so that TB pre-movement tests (if required) can be carried out on time.

Q&A

1. Why are you making this change?

Bovine TB is the biggest and most costly animal health problem facing cattle farmers. Under current rules, on common land cattle tested many months before they move have the potential to mix with animals tested more recently. This policy change will ensure all cattle are tested within 60 days of moving onto the common and therefore help reduce the risk of spreading TB through such cattle movements. These changes are linked to the Draft Strategy for Achieving Officially Bovine TB Free Status for England within 25 years.

2. Who is affected?

If you have common grazing rights and your cattle are tested annually for TB you are likely to be affected by these changes. You would also be affected if a herd using a common in a four yearly testing area tests positive for TB and triggers 3km radial testing.

3. Has this measure been discussed with industry?

Yes, Defra issued a consultation document. Responses to the consultation helped inform our final decision on how these changes will be implemented.

4. My holding is adjacent to the common and I turn out the cattle every day / frequently. Will I need to pre-movement test every time I move my stock?

Not necessarily. In such scenarios AHVLA may grant a licence to allow your cattle to move without a pre-movement test. For this to happen a TB control plan for the whole common would be required, which would be drawn up by the commoners association or other representative body and agreed with AHVLA.

5. How can common land users develop and agree their TB control plans?

As a first step you should contact your commoners association representative or local AHVLA office. Once a control plan – for the whole common – is agreed with AHVLA, **licensed movements back to the home farm without a TB test may be permitted** for graziers with farms adjoining the common. The control plan would need to include a commitment to record the movement of cattle to and from the common land.

6. What will be included in the the commons TB control plans?

These will vary between each common – not least because grazing practices and risks will vary from common to common. However we would expect, for example, all approved control plans to include a commitment to record cattle movements to/from the common. Unless and until a control plan is agreed with AHVLA the default of testing all movement to and from the common would apply.

7. It is not possible to carry out pre-movement testing on the common. Can I carry out a post-movement test instead?

Yes. If it is dangerous or impractical to carry out testing on the common, you will have to test your cattle once they have returned to the farm instead. You should contact your local AHVLA office to agree this. **Cattle returning from common land** should ideally be isolated from other stock until the test has been completed with negative results.

The test must take place as soon as possible after cattle have returned to the farm, and in any case within 120 days of the movement back to the holding otherwise the test will become overdue and the holding will be subject to movement restrictions. Cattle returning from the common must not be moved onto another holding before they have been tested with negative results following the movement from the common, although cattle can be sent directly to slaughter.

Under normal circumstances for post-movement testing, it is recommended that the test should take place between 60 – 120 days after the movement, as there is a risk that infection may go undetected if it was picked up shortly before leaving the common. However, many farmers may wish to test their cattle as soon as possible after they return to the home farm. They will need to decide on a case-by-case basis how soon after the movement that testing should take place, as it may not always be possible to keep the cattle isolated for that long. Cattle will need to be tested again before moving back to the common.

8. Can I use a government-funded TB herd test as a pre- or post-movement test?

Yes, provided the timing of the TB herd test is suitable. However, you will need to arrange and pay for the tests otherwise. Please speak with your AHVLA office if you wish to bring forward the date of your next annual TB test for this purpose.

9. Is there any flexibility in the timing of my routine TB test so I can use that as a pre- or post-movement test?

Yes, there may be some flexibility in the timing of the test. You will need to discuss this further with AHVLA.

10. Will I need to arrange pre-movement testing to or from the common if the move takes place on or after 30 June 2014?

Yes. You will need to arrange a pre-movement test for the movement back to the holding.

If the cattle have already been tested in the previous 60 days then you do not need an additional test. If there is a TB control plan agreed with AHVLA, this might include a provision where pre-movement testing is not required if the move is back to the home farm which adjoins the common land.

11. Will I need to pre-movement test if cattle are being removed from the common for breeding?

Yes, unless you post-movement test or there is an approved TB control plan for the common which states otherwise.

12. I have grazing rights to a common in the four-yearly tested area (e.g. Cumbria). Will I need to pre-movement test?

Only if your herd is subject to annual TB surveillance testing.

13. How can I find out more?

If you have any further questions on how these changes will affect you, please contact your local AHVLA office. For contact details of your local AHVLA Office use the postcode search tool on the AHVLA website:

<http://ahvla.defra.gov.uk/postcode/index.asp>

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This document/publication is also available on our website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/series/bovine-tb-information-notes>

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