



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs



Scottish  
Government  
Riaghaltas  
na h-Alba



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Date: 16/10/23

Dear rescue and rehoming organisation,

### ADVICE ON BRUCELLA CANIS

We understand your organisation imports dogs and so we are writing to you to provide some advice on *Brucella canis*. 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*. The UK has historically 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/publications/human-animal-infections-and-risk-surveillance-group-hairs). 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 can cause a range of clinical signs, including reproductive issues (such as abortion and infertility), back and joint pain, muscle weakness, lameness, swollen glands, weak puppies, and non-specific clinical signs such as lethargy and weight loss. In some cases, there will be no clinical signs at all.

**Diagnosis:** we strongly recommend that any rescue and rehoming organisations considering the importation of puppies and dogs should take precautions and screen the animals as outlined below, *before* deciding to import and rehome them into the UK. This is for the safety of your own staff and volunteers, the animals and the general public. Pregnant dogs are a particularly high risk source of infection and their puppies are also capable of carrying the infection.

We strongly recommend that any animals that test positive are not imported into Great Britain, to protect our human and animal population. We have also written to dog breeders to advise them of this message.

Our National Reference Laboratory for *Brucella canis* is the APHA laboratory at Weybridge. For detection of *Brucella canis* infection, we recommend using the serological tests *Brucella canis* SAT (TC1032) and *Brucella canis* iELISA (TC0116). If **either** test is positive, then the sample is considered serologically positive. If **both** tests are negative, then the sample is considered serologically negative. **We recommend that both tests are undertaken** and that you discuss this and the test results with your vet.

For further information on testing please see attached our frequently asked questions document. This includes information on how to submit samples to the APHA laboratory for testing, including from abroad.

To help improve the understanding of the disease amongst dog owners, the rescue community and 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/default-data/documents/2017/canine-brucellosis-summary.pdf).

**Treatment:** unfortunately, there is no consistently effective treatment protocol for canine brucellosis, so our advice is that the only way to completely eliminate the future risk of transmission is by euthanasia of the infected animal. Where an animal has already been rehomed in the UK, we recognise that this is a difficult decision for dog owners and should be taken in consultation with their private veterinary surgeon.

The summary information sheet provides information on the management of this disease in dogs that test positive, and this includes options and guidance for owners who choose not to euthanise their dogs. However, it is important to note that there are disease risks, both to humans and other dogs, and cost implications associated with these options.

We understand that some organisations have a policy not to euthanise any apparently healthy animals. This is why it is vital that **pets are tested (with the recommended tests outlined**

**above) before importing to Great Britain.** As a responsible rescue organisation, you will need to consider the impact of your policies in these circumstances.

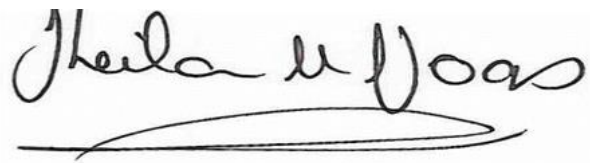
We will continue to gather information on the risk posed by *Brucella canis* to public and animal health. Any evidence gathering will help inform appropriate future policy changes which we endeavour to provide updates on as necessary.

Thank you for your help and understanding with this matter.

Yours Sincerely,



**Professor Christine Middlemiss CB**  
**UK Chief Veterinary Officer**



**SHEILA VOAS**  
**Chief Veterinary Officer (Scotland)**



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