



**NOTE: to be read in conjunction with the BVA position on the control and eradication of bovine Tuberculosis**

# BVA Bovine Tuberculosis and Covid-19 impact assessment

## Introduction

The outbreak of Covid-19 has had a detrimental effect on global healthcare systems with consequences for almost every aspect of life.

During the period of restrictions, veterinary professionals have been working in line with government advice and guidance from the RCVS<sup>1</sup> and BVA<sup>2</sup>. Many of the services provided by vets have been able to continue where they are essential for the protection of animal health, animal welfare, public health and the supply of food.

However, social distancing guidance has had far-reaching consequences for all aspects of veterinary work in the short, medium and longer term. This document is focussed specifically on the effect of the restrictions on the control of bovine Tuberculosis (bTB). During the period of restrictions to date, adherence to social distancing requirements has affected the bTB control programmes operating in the four nations of the UK. This will have consequences across all relevant species: cattle, badgers, and other farmed and wild species.

There is considerable uncertainty about how long restrictions will continue, how they will be lifted and what the wider social, economic, environmental, and political impacts will be. New evidence about Covid-19 is constantly emerging but remains limited. This policy position considers evidence



the vet administers the test and later readings are taken. Consequently, testing these animals is often not possible while maintaining a safe two-metre distance.

This change supports the continued testing of the vast majority of cattle during the period of restrictions while upholding the primacy of human health through the maintenance of social distancing. This will reduce the opportunity for infection to spread undetected in herds. Evidence gathered by government suggests that the infection risk posed by calves of this age is small. This change is pragmatic and welcome for the short term. However, longer term an inability to provide the complete level of assurance that comes from testing full herds may have significant consequences. There will be an increased risk of undetected infection, which may hit the ability to trade internationally. If social distancing measures are required longer term, there may be a need for facilities on farm to be upgraded to support the testing of calves under 180 days.

Across the UK the

Joint messaging between veterinary organisations and farming unions have been prioritised to provide clear messages to both farmers and vets explaining the importance of social distancing and practical guidance on how this should be carried out on farm.<sup>7</sup>

### **Recommendations**

**Guidance is needed to clarify the balance of responsibility between government, vet, and farmer in determining if testing should go ahead.**

