Future Procurement of Professional Veterinary Services

In May 2010, in accordance with public procurement law and EU regulations, Animal Health announced its intention to develop a system for procuring professional veterinary services through open and competitive tendering. Initially, two areas of veterinary services are expected to be included within the scope of the tender: testing for bovine TB, and the supply of contingency veterinary services. Potential suppliers will be able to bid to supply one or both of these services.

The procurement of services, such as export certification, and pre-movement TB testing from OVs by private clients rather than by government, is not expected to change. However, the role Animal Health plays in these arrangements will be subject to review.

Since May, Animal Health has been working to define the details and timetable of this change programme. The work of OVs is greatly valued, and care is being taken to ensure the best possible procurement model is introduced. Various options have been developed and are being assessed, and these will be subject to agreement by Defra. Detailed options for Wales and Scotland have not yet been developed, but when they are, they will need to be agreed by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Government. Initial thinking is that tenders will be issued for work lots which seek to maximise economy of scale benefits. This is likely to result in work being tendered for by geographical areas that are larger than those currently served by most OV practices. Existing suppliers who wish to tender will need to assess how they would deliver a larger volume of work across wider geographical areas.

A firm timetable for future developments has not yet been published. However, in broad terms the programme is likely to proceed in accordance with the following indicative timetable:

a. Planned engagement on the proposals with the profession/industry and other stakeholders is likely to take place early in 2011.
b. Invitations to tender to be issued later in 2011, with a view to award of contracts during late 2011.
c. Allowing for a transitional period, the new arrangements are unlikely to come into effect before spring 2012.

Detailed proposals for Scotland and Wales will not be available by early 2011. In Scotland the time table is extended because the Scottish Government is currently reviewing their TB surveillance strategy, and Animal Health needs to accommodate the provision of services for the remote areas and islands.

For more information please read the ‘frequently asked questions’ document accompanying this newsletter. Animal Health will be contacting OVs again as plans develop. In the meantime, OVs who wish to provide feedback are asked to do so via Janet Taylor:

Janet Taylor, Spur 7, C Block, Government Buildings, Whittington Road, Worcester, WR5 2LQ Janet.Taylor@animalhealth.gsi.gov.uk

Welcome to Your New Look OV Newsletter

Welcome to the first electronic edition of the Official Veterinarian newsletter. From this month, Animal Health will regularly produce a newsletter for OVs that will be distributed to practices and individuals via e-mail. OVs will also be able to view and download this newsletter, and all future editions, by visiting the Animal Health website, www.defra/animalhealth.co.uk

We hope this new way of providing OVs with important information, guidance and advice fills the gap left by the demise of the paper version of the Official Veterinarian newsletter earlier this year. This ‘hard copy’ version was withdrawn because financial constraints meant we could no longer afford the printing and distribution costs.

If you have any comments about the newsletter please e-mail us at ah.corporatecommunications@animalhealth.gsi.gov.uk

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Changes to TB Terminology

Enhancing Bovine TB Controls for some Higher Risk Herds and New Herd Status Terminology

From January 2011, changes will be introduced to enhance bovine TB controls for a group of higher risk herds, and to align the terminology used to describe the status of herds in Great Britain with that used in EU regulations.

From 1 January 2011, the terminology used to describe the TB health status of herds across Great Britain will change to one of the following:

- Officially TB Free (OTF);
- Officially TB Free Suspended (OTFS), or;
- Officially TB Free Withdrawn (OTFW).

Definition of the new terms

Officially TB Free (OTF) status
Officially TB Free (OTF) status will be applied to herds that are not subject to any form of movement restrictions due to TB.

Officially TB Free Suspended (OTFS) status
Herds will have their OTF status suspended (and they will be designated OTFS) when:

- skin test reactors are identified, but none have lesions typical of bovine TB and they are culture negative, or;
- inconclusive reactors are identified, and the herd has had its OTF status withdrawn within the previous three years, or;
- suspected TB lesions are identified at post-mortem examination in one or more animals at routine slaughter, or;
- there is a suspicion of clinical disease in an animal in the herd, or;
- the TB status of the herd is unknown due to a tuberculin skin test becoming overdue, or;
- any combination of the above scenarios.

All herds that have their status suspended due to identification of reactors at a TB test carried out after 1 January 2011 will require:

In England - ONE clear short interval test with negative results before OTF status is regained. However, if either of the following circumstances applies, their status will remain suspended until they have passed TWO consecutive, short interval tests with negative results:

- the herd has had OTFW status in the three years prior to the current breakdown, or;
- the herd is contiguous to another which currently has OTFW status. Herd status will not however be changed retrospectively, i.e. if contiguous herds subsequently have their OTF status withdrawn.

If either of the above criteria applies (in Wales) tracing and contiguous testing will also be generated by the breakdown for herds in Wales. Cattle moving from such herds to England will not, however, be tested, nor will herds in England which are contiguous to such herds in Wales (i.e. herds in England but which border Wales).

In Scotland - Herds designated OTFS will be subjected to an epidemiological risk assessment, which must be discussed with the Scottish Government. On a case by case basis the Scottish Government may withdraw the OTF status.

While the new terminology will be introduced in Scotland on 1 January 2011, there are currently no plans to introduce a regime of additional testing.

Officially TB Free Withdrawn (OTFW) status
From 1 January 2011, herds throughout Great Britain will have their OTF status withdrawn (and they will be designated OTFW) where:

- lesions typical of TB are detected at post-mortem examination, or;
- Mycobacterium bovis (bovine TB) is identified in tissue samples from any animal in the herd, or;
- an additional epidemiological risk is identified by Animal Health.

For a herd with OTFW status to regain OTF status it will require TWO consecutive short interval tests with negative results. In addition, tracings and contiguous herd testing will also be generated by the breakdown.
New Ways of Working – Update on Changes to the Management of TB Test Data

The last edition of the Official Veterinarian newsletter introduced the impending changes to the way Animal Health and OVs will manage TB test data. These changes, which will be brought in during the first half of 2011, will allow OVs performing TB tests to enter data directly on to Animal Health’s core IT system (known as Sam), making the process quicker and more efficient. Animal Health has now developed a more detailed set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that explain the changes more fully and answer some of the queries OVs might have in relation to them.

What is Animal Health changing?
We are changing the way we send and receive TB testing information to and from OVs.

When will this take place?
We plan to make the changes in the first half of 2011.

Why are you making the change?
Animal Health’s Business Reform Programme (BRP) has been changing the way we operate; moving away from paper-based processes towards electronic systems to help us work more efficiently and effectively.

How will this affect me?
Initially, you will be able to go online to view and complete TB tests on our core IT system, known as Sam. Over time Animal Health plans to develop Sam to cover other aspects of our work with OVs.

How will I access Sam?
Authorised users will access Sam on the internet. There will be a link to the system from the Animal Health website.

Will OV practice staff be able to access Sam?
Yes. Authorised OVs and OV practice staff will be able to access Sam, and they will have different roles and permissions within the system. For example, OVs and practice staff will be able to ‘enter’ test data, but only authenticated OVs will be able to ‘submit’ the data to Animal Health.

What training will I receive?
The system is still being developed so it is too early to say what the training requirements will be. In due course we will be able to advise you of what training will be available, together with details of when and where you will be able to access it.

Will my practice be able to continue to carry out TB testing even though we don’t use a PC?
Only for a short time during the ‘roll-out’ phase. Ultimately, a PC and broadband access will be required.

We’ll let you know the minimum Operating System and web browser specifications as soon as they are confirmed. You will also need MS Excel 2007 as well as anti-virus software.

If reactors are found will I still have to issue a paper TB2 Restriction Notice on farm?
Yes. This paper form will still be required as it must be served immediately on identification of Reactors or Inconclusive Reactors, with a copy then being sent to your local Animal Health office.

Will Sam have diary functionality to allow me to manage TB testing workloads?
Sam does not have a diary function in the traditional format. Forthcoming tests, together with their arrangement dates, will be stored in the system and this information can be filtered, allowing you to quickly identify tests that still need to be arranged. This functionality will greatly reduce the volume of telephone calls you would receive from Animal Health enquiring when dates are booked, for example, calls in relation to overdue TB testing.

Does this mean you won’t require a signature for electronically submitted tests?
The RCVS view is that the system sign-on and authorisations we put in place are acceptable.

Will I be able to provide a hard copy of the test results locally to the client?
There will be a facility to issue results locally. We are looking at this to determine the best way to achieve it.

Will I able to check the test history of an animal that is a prospective purchase for my client?
We are looking at this, subject to data protection legislation and confidentiality issues.

I just need a list of animals to be tested. Will the system provide this?
The system will highlight some types of animals that should not be tested - for example, those less than 42 days old.

What IT support will you provide?
It will be similar to the VeBus system used by some practices now. IBM, our IT delivery partner will provide telephone support between 7am and 7pm.

Will you come to my practice to demonstrate the new system?
We will consider any request where operationally possible.

Will I be able to test or try the new system in my practice before it is released more widely?
Where operationally possible we will be happy to consider requests. There will be some user testing of the system before it is released.
Animal Health recently completed the review of Parish Testing Interval (PTI) for England. The revised PTIs will come into force on 1 January 2011. In 2010, a more risk-based approach to setting routine TB testing intervals was applied in England, and it has been agreed that this approach will continue next year.

The measures introduced in England in 2010 came about after problems with the traditional PTI approach were identified. Until 2010, the calculation of TB testing intervals was based primarily on the historical incidence of TB. By its very nature this calculation was ‘reactive’ and, in some areas of expanding or emerging TB incidence, this trailed behind the spread of infection. Additionally, parishes are not the most suitable geographical unit on which to assess herd incidence because of their small size, the varying number of herds within them and their often awkward shape. The use of parishes for setting testing frequencies of TB often led to a ‘patchwork’ arrangement, with different testing intervals across parts of Great Britain. In some cases this meant that annual and four-yearly parishes could be found next to each other.

The PTI approach introduced in 2010 was more proactive than the previous arrangement, because it looked to get ahead of the advancing front of infection in high TB incidence and risk areas. A more coherent distribution of testing intervals across England was adopted that was more consistent with the risk and the epidemiology of bovine TB in each region.

**Principles followed in 2010, which will continue to apply in 2011:**

1. Whole counties in the Southwest of England and the West Midlands will remain on annual TB testing for 2011, on the basis that this represents the expanding area of endemic high TB incidence in England that is largely driven by a significant local wildlife TB reservoir. No pockets of less frequent routine testing will remain within this core annual testing area.

2. Where we are uncertain about the epidemiology of TB in a given area (i.e. the geographical and temporal pattern and origin of new breakdowns) the advice has been to take a precautionary approach, which includes buffering. The northern and eastern edges of the core annual testing area must be separated from the low incidence regions of England by a wide, continuous buffer of two-yearly routine testing intervals. This is to prevent annual and four-yearly testing areas from neighbouring each other. Where TB incidence and other data may warrant it, this buffer will encompass entire counties adjoining the core area. Otherwise, the buffer must be a minimum of two parishes in depth, spanning a strip approximately 10km-wide (although in most places the suggested extensions this year exceed that width on the basis of the considered risk).

3. Within the two-yearly testing buffer, individual parishes may be placed on annual testing if indicated by the traditional testing frequency calculation (e.g. Cheshire, Derbyshire, Warwickshire and the west of Leicestershire).

4. In counties spanning the buffer to the East (including Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire) a parish placed on annual testing has been surrounded with a buffer of two-yearly testing parishes. This has been applied because these counties are considered to be at higher risk than counties in the far north and east of England.

5. The area in the East Sussex coast roughly bounded by Brighton, Lewes and Eastbourne, which has traditionally sustained a low but endemic incidence bovine TB, will be under annual routine testing and surrounded by a buffer of two-yearly testing parishes.

6. The north and east of England, where the incidence and risk of TB has historically been very low and there is no evidence of a wildlife reservoir of TB, will remain on background four-yearly routine testing. Individual parishes in this area that have suffered recent incursions of TB due to movements of infected cattle, as indicated by the outcome of the traditional calculation, may be placed on more frequent testing without buffering, depending on the county level incidence. Where the county level incidence does not reach the EU threshold (basically 0.1% of herds or less affected per year on a six year rolling average individual parish testing intervals are not calculated.)

Continued over page
Evidence from a range of national TB incidence and other epidemiological datasets (e.g. traditional PTI maps, and TB breakdowns detected in the first half of 2010) suggests there has been further limited geographical spread and increased risk of TB. For 2011, the core annual testing area has been extended in some places and the whole of the two-year testing buffer has been widened (particularly in Cheshire and the East Midlands). In doing this the two-year testing buffer and background four-year testing areas have been brought in line with the requirements of EU legislation [Directive 64/432/EEC (as amended)], which states that:

- An area can be on two-year testing if the incidence of confirmed herd breakdowns is between 0.2% and 1% (over 1% and the area must be on annual testing).
- An area can be on four-year testing if the incidence of confirmed herd breakdowns is not more than 0.1%.

With the changes implemented in this review, the historical TB incidences in the whole of the two-yearly and the background four-yearly areas will be within their respective limits. A map representing the is published on page 4, and details of parish testing intervals for 2011 will be available on the Animal Health website in December, click here to view.

Scotland and Wales will take separate approaches to setting PTIs in 2011.

Wales
The Welsh Assembly Government has decided that all of Wales will continue to require annual TB testing in 2011. The Welsh Assembly Government will not be returning to calculating TB testing frequencies on a parish level. As a consequence of annual testing, all cattle keepers in Wales have to comply with Pre-Movement Testing requirements on cattle movements.

Scotland
Parish testing intervals in Scotland will remain unchanged in 2011. Routine four-yearly testing will be retained. TB surveillance will be reviewed again in 2011, informed by research currently underway at Glasgow University.

OVs are reminded that they need to call the appropriate Animal Health International Trade Centre for all import or export related queries rather than their local Animal Health office. The only exception to this rule is when OVs are seeking to arrange Veterinary Officer countersignatures (as required by certain certificates).

Exporters and certifying OVs must make arrangements with the relevant International Trade office as soon as possible. It should be noted that it is not generally possible to arrange this at short notice, or for it to take place out of office hours. Exporters should be made aware that if sufficient notice is not given, certification of consignments (and consequently exports) may be delayed.

The Animal Health Import Team in Chelmsford deals with routine queries on the import of horses, birds and livestock (and their meats, milk and genetic material), and imports of ungulates, amphibians, reptiles, cats, dogs and ferrets (subject to commercial trade). To contact the Chelmsford office, use the details below:

Tel: 01245 454860
Fax: 01245 351162
Email: AHIITChelmsford@animalhealth.gsi.gov.uk, or;
Email: illegal.imports@defra.gsi.gov.uk

International Trade Centre for Exports
Animal Health Divisional Office
Beeches Road
Chelmsford
Essex CM1 2RU

For routine queries about the controls and procedures for the export of cattle, pigs, sheep and goats, equines, birds, poultry, all live animals, genetic material, meat and meat products (and domestic pets), OVs should contact Animal Health’s International Trade Centre for Exports in Carlisle. The office also processes applications for the export of animals and products of animal origin. To contact the Carlisle office, use the details below:

Tel: 01228 403600
Fax: 01228 591900
Email: CentralOps.Carlisle@AnimalHealth.gsi.gov.uk

International Trade Centre for Imports
Animal Health Divisional Office
Beeches Road
Chelmsford
Essex CM1 2RU

The administration of OV appointments and training has now been fully centralised in the Specialist Service Centre at Worcester. This means OVs must contact the team at Worcester for all training requests, appointments, transfers, status changes and terminations queries. OVs should also contact Worcester with any queries regarding their stamp or panel certification (CW10). The Specialist Service Centre at Worcester can be contacted using the details below:

Email: ovteam@animalhealth.gsi.gov.uk
Phone: 01905 768725
Fax: 01905 768649

Address:
OV Appointments & Training Team, Animal Health, Spur 10, Block C, Government Buildings, Whittington Road, Worcester WR5 2LQ
Risks to Pregnant Cattle

Risks to the Health and Welfare of Cattle Transported Long Distances in Late Pregnancy

Defra, the VLA and Animal Health recently wrote to the Veterinary Record to raise concerns about the apparent increase in the numbers of cattle being transported long distances during late pregnancy. We were keen to share this information with veterinary colleagues because the advice given to clients can have a significant impact on the way pregnant cattle are treated before, during and after transportation.

Since July 2009 the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) has investigated the deaths of thirteen heifers transported from Europe in late pregnancy, and Animal Health has reported eight cases of cattle calving during or just after transportation (in breach of current EU regulations) since 2008. While these numbers may seem small when compared to the thousands of cattle that are regularly transported, the scale of the problem is thought to be larger as it is likely many cases are dealt with privately, or deaths are not investigated further when they occur. There are significant risks to the health and welfare of heifers and cows transported over long distances in late pregnancy. The risk may be greater in heifers because they tend to have a shorter pregnancy and more of them are transported when pregnant (the number of imported dairy heifers has increased in the past two years). Additionally, since most pregnant heifers are physically immature during pregnancy they may be more metabolically susceptible to the impact of long distance transport.

Council Regulation EC/1/2005 lays down provisions for the protection of animals during transport. It is an offence to transport any animal in a way which causes it, or is likely to cause it, injury or unnecessary suffering, and transporters and keepers can be prosecuted if they flout the law. In addition, animals which are unfit must not be transported. This includes pregnant dairy cattle transported in the final 10% of their gestation period (with the exception of transportation for veterinary treatment), and in the week following calving. The final 10% rule exception can also be legally applied to pregnant cattle required to be moved for disease control purposes, e.g. TB reactor removal. However, in such circumstances Animal Health applies strict criteria for transporting such animals and protecting their welfare.

In addition, under the Animal Welfare (England & Wales) and the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Acts, animal owners and keepers of animals have a duty of care to provide for their basic needs and to prevent suffering. Someone responsible for an animal who permits another person to cause unnecessary suffering is also committing an offence.

This is also the case if they fail to take reasonable steps to prevent suffering during and after transport. Intra-Community Trade Animal Health Certificates, which official veterinarians sign within 24 hours of transportation from the originating Member State, clearly state the requirements for compliance with the European Regulation EC/1/2005. Keepers and transporters have a key role to play in ensuring the welfare of transported animals, and vets can advise them in this. Both groups, for example, should be aware that energy and water requirements increase considerably for heifers in late pregnancy. This is an important point because some heifers have experienced significant negative energy balance and dehydration during long distance transportation. Additionally, there may be an interruption in food and water intake during transportation (irrespective of whether it is provided regularly), meaning the longer the journey the greater the risk. Any significant changes in dietary management during late pregnancy are likely to lead to metabolic disease and should be avoided. The stress of transportation itself may exacerbate the effect of dietary interruptions/changes and may lower animals’ resistance to disease.

Those importing pregnant cattle are advised to check exact insemination or service dates and expected calving dates for all animals they are importing. It is recommended that pregnant cattle are not transported over long distances in the last two months of pregnancy. This will also allow the animal to adapt to new rearing conditions and changes in dietary management before calving. If transportation is necessary beyond this stage then negative energy balance should be avoided by ensuring appropriate feeding before, during and after transport. Sudden changes in diet should be avoided in all pregnant animals. Upon arrival at the destination farm, heifers should initially remain on the same diet as before transportation and new foods should be introduced gradually. Keepers are also reminded to consider the risk of importing disease by introducing new animals into their herd. Private veterinary advice regarding herd biosecurity, appropriate isolation periods and treatment and vaccination protocols should be detailed in the farm’s herd health plan.

The VLA and Animal Health will continue to monitor the health and welfare of imported pregnant cattle. We encourage private veterinarians to proactively work with their farming clients regarding this problem and to refer cases where appropriate to the VLA or Animal Health for further investigation.
New Arrangements for Sampling Fallen Sheep and Goats for TSEs

EU rules require the UK to test 10,000 fallen adult sheep and 500 adult goats each year for TSEs (Scrapie and BSE). Currently, farmers volunteer sheep carcases for testing, and they are required by law to notify the RPA - via the TSE Helpline - if they have goat carcases. The RPA provides a free collection and disposal service for carcases accepted for the survey.

From 4 January 2011, these arrangements will change. The TSE Helpline and free collection and disposal service will close, and farmers will no longer need to notify the RPA of fallen goats. Instead, carcases will be randomly selected at animal by-products plants based on quotas provided by Animal Health. Samples will also be taken during routine inspections by Animal Health, and Defra will continue to fund sampling, transport of samples and laboratory analysis.

The new system will mean a more random TSE survey in line with EU rules. This will help improve understanding of the prevalence of scrapie in sheep and goats across the country.

Farmers already dispose of the vast majority of fallen stock at their own expense, and the changes will affect less than one per cent of fallen sheep and less than 20 per cent of fallen goats.

Members of the Compulsory Scrapie Flock Scheme (CSFS), will continue to have their fallen adult sheep and goats collected, transported and disposed of free of charge. However, from 4 January 2011 members will need to report their fallen stock to the Animal Health TSE Helpline, 0845 601 4858 (during working hours), as the RPA’s TSE Helpline will not take calls after 31 December 2010.

Chicken Stocking Density and ‘Grandfather Rights’


The regulations set a maximum stocking density limit of 39kg/m² for conventionally reared chicken. They also require keepers of 500 or more conventionally reared meat chickens to notify Animal Health if they wish to stock birds at more than 33kg/m² up to a maximum of 39kg/m². Notification must be made through a Meat Chicken Notification Form which is being sent to all known producers. Keepers in Scotland and Wales are now being sent a pre-populated Notification Form based on details contained in the GB Poultry register. English keepers will receive theirs in the New Year. The form is also used to apply for ‘Grandfather Rights’ in respect of demonstrating competence and/or training.

The legislation requires keepers of conventionally reared meat chickens to have undertaken recognised formal training on specific aspects of meat chicken welfare. However, if a keeper is at least 21 years of age and has a minimum of five years experience of keeping meat chickens in the last 10 years, they may apply for ‘Grandfather Rights’ instead of undertaking this formal training. Keepers will only be able to apply for ‘Grandfather Rights’ until 30 June 2011. After this date those that haven’t applied will be expected to have obtained, or be working towards, a recognised formal training qualification. ‘Grandfather Rights’ will be granted for life unless an on-farm welfare concern is identified which may be rectified by formal training.
TB Controls in Wales: Introduction of Veterinary Improvement Notices

The September edition of the Official Veterinarian included an article about the Tuberculosis (Wales) Order 2010 and the introduction of Veterinary Improvement Notices (VINs) from 1 January 2011. As VINs will be coming into force very shortly, the following information has been sent to herd owners in Wales.

What is a Veterinary Improvement Notice?
A Veterinary Improvement Notice (VIN) is a notice that can be issued to cattle keepers advising them of actions they need to take to help prevent the spread of bovine TB. They were introduced by Article 11 of the Tuberculosis (Wales) Order 2010. Animal Health will start to use them from 1 January 2011. They will be used in cases where the Veterinary Inspector thinks that the cattle keeper should do something, or stop doing something, for the purpose of preventing the spread of bovine TB.

Who issues Veterinary Improvement Notices?
A VIN will be prepared by an Animal Health Veterinary Inspector and then approved by the Animal Health Regional Veterinary Lead before being issued to a keeper.

If a Veterinary Improvement Notice is issued what will that mean? The VIN will require a cattle keeper to undertake certain practical actions by a date specified in the notice. Additionally, a map may be attached to the VIN to specify the location of any actions required.

What kind of actions might need to be taken by the keeper? The Veterinary Inspector will indicate what actions are required to be taken by the keeper in the form of a notice. Specific actions may include the following:

1. Protecting boundaries – Erecting and maintaining biosecure boundaries, e.g. erecting a stock-proof fence, or not grazing cattle in those fields for a specific period, (as marked on a map) to prevent nose to nose contact with cattle on neighbouring land.
2. Reducing contact between cattle and badgers – reducing access to buildings, grazing patterns not grazing certain fields and avoiding badger setts.
3. Protection of feed stores - Making your farmyard less attractive to wildlife, particularly badgers, by taking practical measures to stop them from gaining access to feed stores, silage clamps and feeding troughs.
4. Other - measures not covered by the above.

What if a Veterinary Improvement Notice is not complied with? When a VIN is served it should leave no doubt as to what the keeper needs to do. It will normally be issued with an agreed timescale for completion of the specified actions. If the work required is still outstanding and the deadline for completion has passed when subsequent reactors are identified then this would impact on the compensation payable for reactors.

Cattle keepers whose bovine TB compensation payment is affected due to non-compliance will have a right of appeal against the calculation of animal value (as set out in Article 26 of the Order).

More information about VINs can be obtained by contacting your local Animal Health office. More information regarding the TB Order 2010 is available on the Welsh Assembly Government website.

New Controls on Sheep Scab in Scotland

New controls are being introduced to deal with the persistent problem of sheep scab in Scotland. The Sheep Scab (Scotland) Order 2010 becomes effective on 17 December.

It puts a legal obligation on any person who suspects that sheep in their care or possession have the infection to notify Animal Health as soon as possible. Movement restrictions will then apply to the whole flock until the sheep are either treated or slaughtered, or a veterinary surgeon provides a negative diagnosis.

The changes also mean that owners or keepers who fail to take appropriate action on sheep scab, as well as not having movement restrictions lifted, may be liable for prosecution.

The Order is part of an initiative by the Scottish Government, the Scottish sheep industry and other stakeholders to raise awareness of sheep scab and to promote best practice regarding the management and prevention of the disease. This includes preventing straying, seeking veterinary involvement prior to treatment and cooperation with neighbouring flocks. Where keepers do not notify or follow-through in this way, local authorities can enforce good practice by restricting flocks and compelling veterinary involvement. Local authorities can also instigate notification (e.g. scab suspected at a market).

As veterinary involvement will be privately funded it is not necessary for vets to be on OV “panels” for this work. However, where there is a welfare problem then the existing imperative to contact Animal Health remains. A free diagnostic testing service will continue to be provided by SAC.

Animal Health will notify local authorities of all new cases of the disease, collate information, and on a monthly basis provide data to Scottish Government about new incidents and the resolution of existing cases.

The Scottish Government recently issued a press release to publicise the Order, and will shortly circulating guidance to veterinarians. Queries should be addressed to the Scottish Government at animalhealth@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

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Short-tail Docking: Appeal to OVs

OVs are being asked to help Animal Health by reminding sheep farmers and keepers of their responsibilities in relation to docking their animals.

Animal Health is asking for assistance after noting a rising trend in the numbers of sheep - particularly pedigree breeds - which have had their tails docked excessively short. Sheep farmers and keepers could face prosecution if they dock their animals' tails shorter than the permitted length, and they risk having a significant portion of payments due to them under the Single Payment Scheme (SPS) withheld.

Livestock owners need to be aware of the legislation concerning tail docking, and the code of recommendations for the welfare of sheep. Amongst other things the code explains that docking should be carried out in strict accordance with the law - and only then if failure to do so would lead to subsequent welfare problems. Tail docking should only be performed by a competent, trained operator.

It is a legal requirement that sufficient tail is retained to cover the vulva of female sheep and the anus of male sheep. Short-tail docking can lead to a number of welfare issues, including increased occurrence of rectal prolapse, as well as faecal contamination of the hindquarters. This is because short-tail docking can damage both the muscles and nerves supplying the sheep’s anus. If the tail is left long enough to be raised, it lifts the supporting tissue around the anus and directs any diarrhoea away from the body. If the tail is amputated close to the body soiling of the skin and fleece can occur, creating additional problems and greatly increasing the dangers of fly strike. Short-tail docking may also contribute to the incidence of vaginal prolapse later in life.

Depending on the severity of the breach of regulations, sheep owners who do not dock their animals in accordance with the legal requirements can have their payments under SPS reduced by between 3% and 100%. Sheep keepers found to have short-tails docked in 2008 will still need to be tested, and eligible movements from affected herds will still require pre-movement testing, until such time as they are notified otherwise. Queries on individual herd and test issues should be directed to the local Animal Health office.

The code of recommendations for the welfare of sheep can be obtained through the Animal Health website.

Tell us what you think about the OV Newsletter

If you have any feedback on the current edition of the newsletter, or suggestions about how to improve it, please get in touch. We would be particularly interested to hear about topics and subject matters you feel we should be covering in the newsletter.

To give us your feedback e-mail us via ah.corporatecommunications@animalhealth.gsi.gov.uk

Regional Round-up

This section of the newsletter can be used by Animal Health offices to inform OVs about activities, news and developments in their area. This edition only contains news from the North East of England region, however, contributions from other offices can be expected in future editions.

North East England Region

Northumberland will revert to background four year testing in the New Year, after the incidence of TB in the county fell below the threshold level at which parish level testing intervals are calculated. The testing interval for herds currently located in one and two year testing parishes in Northumberland will revert to four year testing from January 2011, unless they are on increased testing for other reasons (e.g. using raw milk, heifer rearing etc.) This brings the county into line with Durham, Cleveland and Tyne and Wear.

Individual herds that are already in their testing window will still need to be tested, and eligible movements from affected herds will still require pre-movement testing, until such time as they are notified otherwise. Queries on individual herd and test issues should be directed to the local Animal Health office.

TB Risk in the North East

It is important to note that the TB risk to herds in the region is not materially altered by the PTI changes. We would appreciate continued assistance from OVs in communicating this to cattle keepers, who may begin to feel more relaxed regarding the risk.

Cattle movements from high incidence areas still pose a threat of TB introduction. Animal Health staff continue to carry out large numbers of tracing tests as a result of the confirmation of TB in herds that have consigned cattle to our area, and two cases have been found by this route in recent weeks. Cattle from high incidence areas often move to our area via an indirect route, and it may be prudent for purchasers to enquire as to the TB risk of all holdings that cattle have been on, not just the last one.

North East TB partnership group

Representatives from Animal Health, the North East Veterinary Association, the regional development agency and various industry representative groups have met to discuss actions that might be taken regionally to help reduce the risk posed by TB to the North East. This generated some positive ideas that are being considered and taken forward.

For further information, or to register an interest in being involved with the partnership group, please contact Peter Gray or Pauline Watson at the Animal Health office.

Disease Alerts

Receive free alerts on:
- classical swine fever
- bluetongue
- avian influenza
- Newcastle disease
- foot and mouth disease
- exotic equine disease
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