businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Bovine tuberculosis

In the guide

General rules
Exemptions to the rules
Test records
Testing intervals
Cost of testing
Notifiable diseases
Further information
Trading Standards
In this update
Key legislation

In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England

England is currently divided into three risk areas in relation to bovine tuberculosis (bTB): the 'high risk area' (HRA), the 'edge area' and the 'low risk area' (LRA). The surveillance, breakdown management and disease-prevention policies differ in each area. A map of the different bTB risk areas in Great Britain can be found on the TB Hub website.

All cattle on unrestricted farms that are within the HRA and edge areas are subject to pre-movement testing. This also includes higher-risk herds in the LRA. All cattle moved on to unrestricted farms in the LRA are subject to post-movement testing. Subject to meeting certain criteria, free pre-movement testing may be available for sales of at least 20 cattle from unrestricted cattle in the LRA. Further details are available in the Government TB Information Note 03/16.

Farmers in England may submit blood samples for bTB testing to an Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) laboratory. This is at their own expense and subject to prior APHA approval. There are a limited number of scenarios in which the private blood test is available outside of the Government-funded testing programme; see TB Information Note 04/16.

General rules

If anyone suspects the presence of bTB, they must tell APHA immediately by telephoning 0300 020 0301. If the person making this notification is not the keeper of the animals, they must also notify the keeper.

Cattle in the HRA and edge areas are subject to annual or six-monthly herd surveillance (skin) testing. Cattle in the LRA are subject to four-yearly herd surveillance (skin) testing, with the exception of higher-risk herds, which are tested annually.

Cattle moving from the premises they are on (if not a bTB restricted herd) are required to have tested negative for bTB in the 60 days prior to the movement, unless the herd or type of movement meets any of the exemptions.

Keepers who receive a bovine animal from the LRA of England and Wales, or from the specified area* of another part of England or Wales, must arrange a post-movement skin test 60-120 days after the date of arrival.

[*The specified area is defined in Schedule 3 to the Tuberculosis in Animals (England) Order 2021 (see link in 'Key legislation' below).]

Moving to grass keep will involve a movement to other premises; testing will be required before the movement. Testing is also required on return if the cattle have stayed on the keep for more than 60 days.

Your routine bTB test also counts as a pre-movement test, and you can, with the consent of a veterinary inspector, adjust the time of year that this is carried out to fit in with the farming practice and the disposal of stock.

Exemptions to the rules

- Calves less than 42 days old at the date of the movement
- Cattle that are subject to annual bTB testing for public health reasons only - for example, open farms or those required to test for dairy hygiene
- Cattle at an approved semen collection centre
- Cattle moved direct to a slaughterhouse or slaughter market
- Cattle moved to an exempt or approved finishing unit
- Cattle moved to an exempt market. An exempt market is one where cattle can be moved only to an exempt finishing unit, a slaughterhouse or returned home (unless in the LRA)
- Cattle moved to an approved 'collecting centre' for bTB restricted cattle
- Movement of cattle for veterinary treatment and return to their premises of origin, or that are killed or go direct to slaughter
- Movement of cattle from herds that are in a four-yearly testing area (provided they are not classed as a higher-risk herd)
- Any movement under the authority of a licence
- Cattle moved to an agricultural show that does not involve a stay of more than 24 hours or housing of the animals at the showground and returned to their premises of origin, or that move directly to slaughter from the show

Test records

As soon as practicable after the results of the test have been read by an inspector or approved veterinary surgeon, the keeper of the animals must be given a written record of the results.

The keeper of any animal that has been tested for bTB must:

- Retain the records of the results of the test for three years and 60 days from the date of the injection of tuberculin
- Produce such records when requested by an inspector
- Enter the test details into their own farm veterinary medicine record

Farmers are advised to take a copy of the clear results of the test (undertaken during the previous 60 days) with them when presenting cattle moved off a farm for sale at market.

Testing intervals

Details of bTB testing intervals are available on the GOV.UK website.

Cost of testing

Herd owners are expected to cover the costs of the licensed veterinary inspector's time to carry out pre- and post-movement tests. The Government will continue to fund the provision of all routine bTB surveillance testing. In qualifying circumstances, the Government will pay for pre-movement testing of cattle moving from farms in the LRA.

Notifiable diseases

For information on diseases that are notifiable (which means there is a legal requirement to report cases and suspected cases to APHA), please see 'Notifiable diseases'.

Further information

Further information on bTB can be found on the GOV.UK website. GOV.UK also has specific information on pre- and post-movement testing, including requirements for cross-border movements within Great Britain.

Also of interest is the TB Hub website, which contains many practical guides.

Tuberculosis is subject to regulatory control and can affect other species of farmed livestock - for example sheep, goats, pigs, deer and camelids, such as llamas and alpacas. Please see the information about TB in non-bovine species on the TB Hub.

Finally, the GOV.UK website has information on controlling the risk of bTB from badgers.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law, please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: May 2026

Key legislation

- Animal Health Act 1981
- Tuberculosis in Animals (England) Order 2021

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

© 2026 Chartered Trading Standards Institute

Source URL:
https://businesscompanion.owastaging.co.uk/en/quick-guides/animals-and-agriculture/bovine-tuberculosis