businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

BSE testing of cattle

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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

Livestock keepers must be aware of the sampling requirements for the purposes of monitoring bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle. Livestock keepers must ensure that fallen cattle requiring BSE testing are disposed of to an approved BSE sampling site.

Subject to exceptions based on age and country of birth, all cattle that die or are slaughtered on-farm or in transit (other than for human consumption) are required to be tested for BSE.

Farmers are required to contact an approved collector within 24 hours of death to arrange delivery of the carcase to an approved sampling site within a further 48 hours. Within seven days, these cattle deaths must be recorded in the holding register, notified to the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS), and the cattle passports returned to BCMS.

Cattle keepers are responsible for the correct disposal of cattle aged under 48 months (or 24 months if appropriate) at time of death. They do not require BSE testing and can be sent to any suitable approved animal by-products premises - for example, knacker's yard or via the National Fallen Stock Company (NFSCo) in accordance with animal by-products legislation (see 'Fallen stock and the disposal of animal by-products').

BSE testing requirements

Cattle intended for human consumption

Most healthy cattle slaughtered in an abattoir for human consumption do not need to be BSE tested. However, the following cattle must still be tested for BSE:

- Healthy cattle aged over 30 months that were born in Bulgaria, Romania or any non-EU country other than the UK
- Cattle sent for emergency slaughter and cattle that are identified as sick at ante-mortem inspection, if appropriate:
    - Aged over 48 months, if born in the United Kingdom or in EU Member States except Bulgaria and Romania
    - Aged over 24 months, if born in Bulgaria, Romania or any non-EU country other than the UK

Cattle not intended for human consumption

All fallen cattle that die or are killed on-farm or in transit (other than for human consumption) must be tested for BSE if they are over:

- 48 months old, if born in the United Kingdom or in EU Member States except Bulgaria and Romania
- 24 months old, if born in Bulgaria, Romania or any non-EU country other than the UK

Responsibilities

The carcases are the responsibility of the cattle keeper, and must be sent to an approved sampling site.

Cattle keepers do not need to contact the TSE surveillance helpline. They must contact a collector within 24 hours of death to arrange delivery to an approved sampling site, or deliver the carcase themselves. In the latter case, they should contact an approved sampling site to agree this within 24 hours, and must deliver the carcase within a further 48 hours.

Contact your normal collector or the NFSCo on 01335 320014. Government support is available via NFSCo.

Collectors must deliver these carcases to an approved sampling site within 48 hours of agreeing to provide a collection service or of a carcase coming into their possession, whichever is the sooner.

Record keeping

All deaths on holdings must be recorded in the holding register within seven days of the death, together with the:

- Date the carcase was removed
- Description of the carcase, including the ear tag number
- Destination
- Name of the haulier

The keeper must also notify BCMS of the death within seven days, by one of the following methods:

- CTS Online
- CTS Web Services from some farm software packages
- CTS self-service phone line
- Completing the death details in the animal's passport and/or registration certificate and returning it to BCMS

The only exception to this is where a beast is slaughtered outside a slaughterhouse, but is sent to a slaughterhouse for dressing. In these cases, the keeper must complete the death details in the passport and send it with the carcase to the slaughterhouse. The occupier of the slaughterhouse must then notify BCMS of the death of the animal, and return the passport with seven days of death.

Whichever method of notifying BCMS of a death is chosen, the cattle passport must be returned to BCMS within seven days.

An animal by-product commercial document must also be completed and retained (see 'Fallen stock and the disposal of animal by-products').

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'.

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

- Cattle Identification Regulations 2007
- Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2013
- Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (England) Regulations 2018

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.

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