

# Brucellosis Policy

## What is Brucellosis?

Brucellosis is a disease caused by a bacteria called *Brucella canis*. There are several other types of *Brucella* which can affect different species. *B. canis* is generally viewed as an infection in dogs however can affect other species including humans, cats or foxes if they are in close contact.

Brucellosis is routinely present in large parts of the world's dog population and is particularly prevalent in Romania and the surrounding countries. It is currently rare in the UK, however with the increase in popularity in re-homing and rescuing dogs from abroad we are starting to see an increase in cases of Brucellosis here in the UK.

## Symptoms in Dogs

Clinical Brucellosis is currently very rare in the UK, but signs may include spinal pain, testicular pain or swelling, discharge from the vulva or penis, infertility, abortion or eye problems. However, most of the infected dogs we see do not show any symptoms.

Infected dogs can shed bacteria in any bodily fluid. Reproductive fluids (including milk) pose the highest risk but blood, saliva, nasal secretions, urine, faeces and joint fluid can also contain the bacteria.

## Human Health Risks

For people, symptoms can range from none through to severe. Most will be mild and generalised, such as fever, loss of appetite, and weight loss. In some cases, infection can lead to severe complications like endocarditis or meningitis. These symptoms can take months or even years to develop in chronically infected individuals.

As most bacteria is shed in reproductive fluids, contact with unneutered animals pose the biggest risk to human health.

Immunocompromised individuals or children under 5 years may face higher risks however there is very little data on this. The risk to the general UK population is considered to be very low. The risk to people working or living with infected animals is considered to be low.

## **I've imported a dog from abroad, what should I do?**

If you have imported a dog we will ask you where they came from and when they arrived in the UK. We will also ask you to confirm whether your dog has been neutered.

Unneutered dogs are most at risk from catching Brucella as the disease is largely sexually transmitted between dogs, however it can also be passed from mums to pups so any dog can be affected without showing any outward signs of the disease.

All imported dogs should have a blood test to see if they have the disease. It can take up to three months for evidence of antibodies to be present blood following infection so newly imported dogs should have a blood test at their first appointment with the vets and they may need a repeat blood test when three months has passed. Imported dogs that have been in this country for more than three months are likely to only need one blood test. Dogs that are infected as young puppies may take longer to show antibodies so these will need a test once they are over 1 year old.

We have in house tests that will give us an immediate answer however these are not as reliable as sending blood to the UK National Brucella Reference Laboratory at APHA Weybridge. For this reason, we may use in house tests in emergency situations or if a dog has been in the UK less than 3 months. Unfortunately, we have no data about the reliability of the tests used in other countries, so we are unable to accept these as proof of your dog's Brucellosis status.

## **What are my options if my dog is positive?**

Any family with a dog that is positive for Brucellosis will need to consider the risks carefully. The most appropriate course of action will vary with every dog. Factors to consider include the dog's health status (do they have any other conditions?) and your family circumstances (is anyone immunocompromised or are there young children in the house). Sometimes euthanasia will be most appropriate course of action to safeguard you and your family's (human and canine) health and wellbeing while considering your dog's welfare. If this is not appropriate, then you need to minimise any risks your dog may pose. Neutering is the first simple step in this process. For other precautions specific to your circumstances please talk to your vet.

## **What is the Vale doing to keep you and our staff safe?**

Although the risk to people is low it is important that we protect human health. This means we need to know if a dog is positive for the disease. To achieve this, we will be requiring all imported dogs to be tested for Brucellosis in order for them to be registered with the Vale Veterinary Group. If dogs are positive, we will do our best to

look after them whilst keeping people safe. In order to minimise the risk of dogs that could be shedding Brucellosis within the practice we ask that all dogs that test positive for the disease are neutered. If neutering is not an option for you, we unfortunately will be unable to register your dog with the Vale Veterinary Group.

### **Positive Neutered Dogs**

The service you receive if you present a positive neutered dog may look a bit different to usual. We will use appropriate PPE for the situation, this may be gloves or may include aprons, masks and eye protection.

We will try to offer the same standard of service that we would for all other pets however we cannot guarantee this as it will depend on our other patients and available staff on the day. This will particularly be relevant to out of hours care. We will always provide initial emergency treatment, but we may have to discuss other options or refer you to a specialist centre to provide full care. Treatment of positive dogs will incur additional charges if PPE and specific nursing care are required.

### **References:**

HAIRS Risk Assessment - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hairs-risk-assessment-brucella-canis/hairs-risk-assessment-brucella-canis>

APHA advice for veterinary staff - <http://apha.defra.gov.uk/documents/surveillance/diseases/Canine-Brucellosis-Summary.pdf>

Government advice for the public and dog owners - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/brucella-canis-information-for-the-public-and-dog-owners>