



BRUCELLA CANIS – HAH POLICY

Brucellosis

Brucellosis: has your dog been imported from outside the UK?

IF THE ANSWER IS “YES”, PLEASE READ ON.

Adopting a rescue dog from abroad can be a highly rewarding experience, and many of our clients may have welcomed a new dog into their family this way. Unfortunately, there is sometimes a risk that imported dogs may carry diseases not typically found in the UK. These diseases can be very serious for your dog, and some can also be passed on to humans. Imported dogs may be infected without showing any obvious signs of illness themselves.

If you have adopted an imported dog that has not been tested for *Brucella canis* since importation to the UK (or has been mated with or born to a non-UK-tested dog), please inform us as soon as possible. One of our veterinary surgeons will discuss your dog and recommend whether testing is necessary.

What is Canine brucellosis?

Canine Brucellosis is a contagious disease (caused by *Brucella canis* bacteria) found in many parts of the world, but until recently, it was only rarely reported in the UK. In the last few years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of cases of Brucellosis canis diagnosed in dogs across the UK, mostly in imported dogs or those in close contact with imported dogs.

Canine Brucellosis can spread between dogs and also to humans and is now a notifiable disease, reportable to the APHA (the government’s Animal and Plant Health Agency).

The APHA has asked Veterinary Practices in the UK to set up canine brucellosis protocols to protect veterinary staff, owners and our UK dog population from this disease.

The most concerning characteristic of *Brucella canis* infection is that many infected dogs exhibit no clinical signs for years yet can still transmit the disease to other dogs and humans in the meantime.



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Your imported dog may appear healthy for some years, but it could pose a risk to you and your family, especially if it is not neutered. **An infected dog can pass *Brucella canis* to the veterinary staff caring for it, particularly during surgical operations and dental procedures.** The only reliable way to detect the presence of *Brucella canis* in an imported dog is by blood test.

Why is HAH telling me this?

We want our clients, to be fully informed. Following APHA and Public Health England advice, and in collaboration with other clinics in the UK, we are implementing a *Brucella canis* screening protocol.

We are taking this step primarily to protect veterinary staff who may be exposed to body fluids while treating your pets and also to contribute to efforts to prevent this disease from becoming endemic in the UK. In addition, if a member of your household is or becomes immunosuppressed or is an infant (with an immature immune system), it's best to know if your pet is carrying *Brucella canis*.

Currently, when you call us to schedule an appointment, register as a new client or to register a new pet our receptionists may ask if you own any imported dogs or dogs that have lived abroad. Please be patient if you are asked this more than once. We are looking out not just for the safety of our staff but the safety of you and our UK dog population.

How is *Brucella canis* diagnosed?

Brucella is diagnosed by blood tests for antibodies to the disease. HNVC is using the APHA-recommended double-antibody test (SAT and ELISA).

Brucellosis antibodies can take up to three months to appear in a dog after initial infection, so false negative results (when the test result is negative, but the dog does have the disease) can occur if the test is carried out too soon. Testing a dog before it leaves its home country, as many rescues have started to do, is sensible, but the APHA and the European Scientific Counsel Companion Animal Parasites (ESCCAP) still recommend that every imported dog is retested 3-6 months after arrival and in the case of puppies a second test at 12 months old, when their immune system is considered mature.

When an infected dog has been transported in a closed van with others, repeat testing becomes crucial, as all the dogs in that transport will inevitably have been exposed to aerosol-borne bacteria and viruses and potentially also to urine and faeces from other transported dogs.



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Infection can also be acquired from mating with an infected imported dog or bitch and can be passed from mother to puppies.

IF YOU HAVE AN IMPORTED DOG – what happens next:

If you have a certificate indicating a negative *Brucella canis* test result, we will ask to see it (it can be brought in or emailed, whichever is more convenient). If this test was carried out in the UK at an appropriate time after arrival, we will accept it as evidence that your dog is free from the disease. A negative test taken when your dog was still living in an infected country does not totally exclude the possibility of disease, as it can take up to 3 months for antibodies to form. Therefore, if your dog has not yet been tested in the UK, we will ask you to test again.

To draw blood, our vets and nurses are required to wear PPE; we endeavour to keep this as animal-friendly as possible. You are encouraged to stay with your pet and even hold them if you wish, as this usually helps dogs feel less worried. Some clients prefer not to do so, and this is perfectly ok – after all, you know your dog better than we do.

Clients may request sedative-type medication for their pets prior to the appointment. We have tried and trusted protocols for this that we already use for standard visits for some of our more nervous patients.

The blood will be sent to the APHA laboratory, and it takes 1-2 weeks for the results to be returned.

Testing of imported dogs is not yet legally required; however, due to the risk to our staff during certain treatments, if you do not have your imported dog tested, we will, unfortunately, be forced to request that you seek alternative veterinary care.

We would like to state that if your dog returns a positive test, we would still undertake to provide veterinary care – but with specific staff safety measures in place, which would be explained to you, and from a reduced pool of veterinary staff. Additionally, we would not be able to offer certain higher-risk procedures, such as scaling and polishing of teeth.

TO CONCLUDE:

If you have an imported dog that has not been tested for *Brucella canis* since importation to the UK (or that has been mated with or born to a non-UK-tested dog), please **contact** as soon as possible. One of our veterinary surgeons will discuss your dog and recommend whether testing is necessary.



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There has been some considerable misinformation about *Brucella canis* on social media, and we would suggest that you also take a look at the links below for more accurate information:

[World Zoonoses Day – How you can help protect our dogs from *Brucella canis* – Government Vets \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

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

<https://www.bva.co.uk/take-action/our-policies/brucella-canis/>