

Brucella Canis FAQs

What is *Brucella Canis*?

Brucella is an infectious disease of dogs caused by the bacteria *Brucella Canis*. Until recently, the UK has been free of *Brucella Canis*. Increasing numbers of cases are now being seen, primarily linked to imported dogs or dogs having had close contact with imported dogs. *Brucella Canis* is now listed as a reportable disease under the amended Zoonoses Order 2021.

What countries are considered high risk for Brucellosis in imported dogs?



LOW RISK: Australia, New Zealand, and the following European countries / territories: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Switzerland, Germany, Jersey, Guernsey, Scilly Isles, Italy & Sicily, Iceland, Ireland & Northern Ireland, Netherlands, Nordic countries (Norway/Sweden/Finland), Portugal, Spain, Andorra, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, San Marino

HIGH RISK: Any country not listed under 'low-risk' including Russia, USA, Canada, and the following European countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Republic of Kosovo, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine

What are the clinical signs of *Brucella Canis* in dogs?

Clinical signs range from reproductive signs (abortion / infertility) to discospondylitis (neck/back pain), uveitis (inflammation within the eye), lameness, lymphadenopathy (enlarged lymph nodes), scrotal swelling, vulval discharge, weakness and lethargy. Some dogs may be subclinical and exhibit no clinical signs at all. These dogs can still be infectious and transmit the disease. They may also develop clinical signs later in life.

Why are we concerned about *Brucella Canis*?

It is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can be passed from dogs to humans. Whilst reported cases of transmission to people are rare, HAIRS (Human Animal Infections and Risk Surveillance Group) have identified certain individuals with having a greater risk of exposure to infectious material. Veterinary and laboratory staff, owners of infected dogs, kennel staff and dog breeders are all identified on this list.

How is *Brucella Canis* transmitted to humans?

Brucella Canis can be transmitted via aerosols or if infectious materials contact mucous membranes (eyes/mouth) or areas of broken/damaged skin. The greatest risk is thought to be from exposure to fluids and tissues associated with whelping and abortion. There is also a risk from urine, joint fluid, blood, milk and tissues and to a lesser extent, faeces, saliva and nasal secretions.

The elderly, young children and immunocompromised individuals may experience more severe symptoms if they become infected.

What are the clinical signs of *Brucella Canis* in people?

Infected humans can be asymptomatic, have non-specific symptoms such as lethargy, headaches and weight loss or present with severe illness and complications.

What happens if my dog is imported from (or has travelled to?) a high-risk area?

- New pet registration: Any new pet registered at the practice will be required to have a Brucella test at least 3 months after import.
- Pre-existing patients:
 - o Clinically well and requiring elective procedure: the procedure will be delayed until the Brucella status has been identified with a blood test
 - o Clinically unwell: A patient side lateral flow test will likely be performed (these results will be followed up with the APHA test). PPE will be worn when handling the patient and if they need to be hospitalised, this will be within our isolation ward. We may be unable to perform certain procedures until the brucellosis status is confirmed
- Any dogs travelling to high risk areas on holiday (via AHC) and returning to the practice should have a blood test for Brucella as above.

If my dog was tested pre-import, why do they need to be tested again?

After infection or exposure with *Brucella Canis* it can take up to 12 weeks to seroconvert (produce antibodies). Therefore, we would recommend imported dogs are tested 3 months after import/last exposure to reduce the possibility of a false negative, even if they have tested negative previously. In addition to this, there are different diagnostic tests available with varying degrees of reliability. By testing patients using the recommended tests by APHA (Animal and Plant Health Agency) we can be confident in the validity of the results.

Is it just St James Vet Group that have this policy?

Many practices are now implementing these precautionary measures, including our local referral centre. For non-emergency referrals, testing for *Brucella Canis* with the APHA recommended tests is required prior to being seen at the referral centre.

What happens if my dog tests positive for brucellosis?

New pet registration: Sadly, for staff safety, we will not be able to register your pet with St James Vet Group.

Unfortunately, there is currently no curative treatment for brucellosis, and the only way to eliminate the risk of transmission to humans and other animals is by the euthanasia of the infected patient.

To protect owners, staff and other animals' safety, St James Vet Group are unable to continue to provide registration of an affected patient, and our policy is to request that you look for a practice who could. Although we appreciate it is a hugely difficult decision, for your own safety, and that of others, we would sadly recommend euthanasia of infected pets.

In circumstances where you choose not to euthanise, steps should be taken to minimise (but not eliminate) the risk of spread to animals and humans. More information can be found here:

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

These steps can include:

- Minimise contact of infected dogs with other dogs and humans
- Avoid breeding and consider neutering
- Use of PPE when handling
- Antibiotics can be considered but they will only reduce the risk of spread and sadly not cure the patient

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Further information can be found at:

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