

BRUCELLA CANIS IN DOGS

Emerging Disease information

What is Brucella canis?

Brucella canis is a contagious bacterial disease found in many parts of the world but, until recently, not in the UK. Since 2020 there have been several hundred cases of Brucellosis diagnosed in dogs across the UK both in imported dogs and those in close contact with them.

This infection can spread between dogs but also to humans and is now reportable to APHA (the government Animal and Plant Health Agency).

All Veterinary Practices in the UK are therefore being asked to be on the look out for Brucellosis and set up protocols to protect owners, veterinary staff and our UK dog population from this disease.

What are the symptoms in dogs?

Unfortunately, many dogs carry Brucella without showing any symptoms at all so, just because your imported dog is well, or has been in the UK for years already, does not indicate it is no risk to yourself or others.

Symptomatic dogs show a variety of illness ranging from lameness, back ache, enlarged lymph nodes and eye diseases to reproductive failures.

What are the symptoms in people?

In otherwise healthy people, the disease can be mild. In immunosuppressed people such as pregnant women or people undergoing chemotherapy, it can be more severe. Symptoms include fluctuating high temperatures, enlarged lymph nodes, headaches and problems in pregnancy.

How is Brucella spread?

Brucella is spread by fluids from the infected dog (e.g. birthing fluids, vaginal fluids (bitches in season), semen, urine, saliva and blood) coming in contact with the eyes, mouth, nose, wounds or other broken skin of the human or other dogs. Hence mating, giving birth or when vets perform surgery are high risk times for the disease to spread.

How is Brucella canis diagnosed?

Brucella is diagnosed by blood tests looking for antibodies to the disease. Brucellosis antibodies can take up to three months to show up in an infected dog. Therefore false negative results (when the test is negative but the dog actually does have the disease) can occur if the test is carried out within 3-4 months of the dog being in contact with an infected individual.

Why are Old Stone Vets telling me this?

As always, we want you, our clients, to be fully informed but also, we at Old Stone Vets, alongside other clinics in the UK, are implementing a Brucellosis testing protocol.

- When you phone up, our receptionists will ask if you own any imported dogs or any 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 as a whole.
- If you have a certificate indicating a negative Brucellosis test, we shall ask to see it (it can be brought in or emailed, whichever is easier). Remember, 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 3 months for antibodies to form.
- Our vets will advise you to have your dog tested for Brucellosis. The blood will be sent to the APHA laboratory and takes 2-3 weeks for results. At the time of writing, the cost of this blood test is £108.00
- The test is now compulsory, but if you are a new client wanting to come to us and choose not to have the test, we will not register you or your pets.
- If your imported or travelled dog needs to be hospitalised, and has not had the clear APHA test, we will carry out a rapid antibody screening test. This Brucella Screening Snap Test test costs £60.00 and takes less than an hour to run at our Alston surgery but is much less reliable than the blood test recommended above – a positive test is positive but there are many false negatives so a negative result from this in-house test cannot be relied on.
- If the screening test is positive, we are not able to continue to treat your pet in our premises as the health risk for our staff is too high. We may advise home treatment until the full APHA blood test results come back.
- If the APHA test is negative, no further action will be required. However, if it is within 3 months of arriving in the UK, you might consider doing a second test 3 months after arrival.

What happens if the test is positive?:

If your imported/travelled dog tests positive for Brucellosis, we have to report this to the Government via the Animal and Plant Health Agency. The APHA will then contact you.

As there is no treatment that is likely to cure the disease (antibiotics can be used for months but rarely eliminate the disease so infected dogs can remain infectious and a risk to others, for life), it is likely that we will recommend your dog is euthanased.

This is not compulsory but we strongly agree this is the safest thing to do for everyone. If you decide not to carry this out then unfortunately we do not support further treatment

for this disease. Antibiotic therapy/treatment for months may reduce shedding etc but will not conclusively eliminate this disease.

Our policy is for the safety of our staff against zoonotic diseases. We will not be offering treatment for these cases and will recommend euthanasia. You are under no obligation to retain us as your veterinary care providers should you disagree, but it is our legal responsibility to inform your next veterinary care provider with full medical history to protect their staff also.

This might feel worrying but, despite increases in cases brought in by imported dogs, Brucellosis is still very rare in the UK.

If you are looking at buying or importing or rescuing a dog from abroad, firstly, please stop and think if there are dogs in the UK in shelter centres that would perfectly suit a new loving home with you. Most rescue centres are full or almost full to capacity and loads of lovely UK dogs who require your help.

If you still decide to import from another country, whether from a breeder or charity, please make sure they are tested for Brucella (as well as the other foreign diseases such as Leishmaniasis, Ehrlichia and Heartworm).

By working together we hope to stop this disease from increasing further in the UK and hopefully eradicate it again before it becomes endemic. More details about Brucella canis can be found on the DEFRA website:

<http://apha.defra.gov.uk/documents/surveillance/diseases/imported-dog-disease-for-dog-and-cats.pdf>

The source is from dogs that are imported from endemic areas. The areas in question that should be of concern is any country east of the eastern borders of Germany, Austria, Italy and Finland. This includes Romania, Slovenia, Turkey, Greece, Russia etc. and many more. Please see the below map for countries that are classed as low risk (green) and high risk (red).

One of the countries where a particularly large number of rescue dogs come from is Romania. In 2020 there were 30,000 dogs imported from Romania into the UK so there is now a significant influx of dogs that may have the disease.

AHC (Animal Health Certificate) travel for UK pets to Europe:

If your UK resident pet is travelling to the EU on an AHC, we will include a rapid antibody screen test in the price. The new price of an AHC (including the certificate of travel & the Brucella screen test) is now £180.00. This is compulsory for all travelling animals, and we will book a test for 3 months after you return to the UK.

If you travel to the countries outside the “Green Zone”, then we require a full APHA blood test 3 months after returning to the UK.



This information is correct as of Sept 2024, however as we receive information from APHA regarding the disease status of this disease in the UK, things can change over time. We will endeavour to keep as up to date as possible on all these matters.