



Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Protocol for TB Testing During the COVID 19 Pandemic

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During this challenging period associated with COVID-19 pandemic, the Department continues to seek to facilitate farmers in continuing efforts to eradicate TB and undertake testing as required, while also facilitating the continuation of animal movements and the continuity of all elements of the food supply chain. The overriding principle in all situations is that the health and safety of farmers, vets, service providers, contractors, other staff and their families is paramount.

These arrangements will continue in place until 1st October 2020, subject to review. The COVID-19 situation is evolving, and in this context this guidance may change as a result. Updated guidance will be issued as necessary, based on HSE information (see <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>).

Key points:

- The Department is continuing to support farmers through this difficult time by prioritising the delivery of essential services for farmers. The Department supports TB testing continuity using safe practices which observe HSE guidelines, to protect trade and minimise TB spread at this time.
- **Those involved in carrying out a TB test should act in accordance with the guidance of the HSE at all times.** The Department will be guided by the HSE if further actions are required to be taken.
- From **1st September 2020**, the exemption for calves between **42 and 120 days of age** from TB testing will cease. From 1st September onwards, all cattle aged over 42 days must be included in a herd TB test. Calves over 42 days will require a TB test in order to move off the holding.
- Where a herd cannot be TB tested due to COVID19 related issues, the trading status of the herd will be suspended when the herd becomes overdue. When the suspension is then applied, moves directly to slaughter will still be permitted.

Specific guidance for private veterinary practitioners (PVPs) and farmers related to COVID19 when TB testing cattle.

- People involved in carrying out a TB test are advised to act in accordance with HSE guidance.
- Before commencing, the PVP should make a plan with the farmer regarding physical distancing. This can include greater use of a head restraining gate or use of a longer guide stick to help to raise heads, and may include discussion of the use of masks or face-shields based on HSE guidance.
- Only essential personnel should be allowed to be present during a TB test. No children or non-essential adults should be present at any time during the test.
- Avoid direct close contact such as hand shaking.
- Use outdoor facilities where practicable
- When moving between farms – PVPs should fully and properly disinfect, including hand washing.
- Do not test an animal where the PVP or farmer form the opinion that social distancing guidelines cannot be complied with.

Specific guidance on situations which may arise:

If a situation arises which is not addressed in this document, please contact your RVO.

1. A farmer is not available to present his/her cattle for TB testing as he/she is self-isolating due to symptoms of COVID19.

The farmer should follow HSE advice and not present the cattle for testing himself/herself. If possible, alternative arrangements should be made so that someone else can assist with the TB test on his/her behalf. If this is not possible, the RVO should be informed and the test can be delayed. The herd will have its trading status suspended when it becomes overdue for being out of test. When the suspension is then applied, moves directly to slaughter will still be permitted.

2. A farmer is not available to present his/her cattle for TB testing as he/she is in a vulnerable or at-risk group and is self-isolating, or is over 70 years of age and is cocooning.

The farmer should not be required to present the cattle for testing himself/herself. If possible, alternative arrangements should be made so that someone else can assist with the TB test on his/her behalf. If this is not possible, the RVO should be informed and the test can be delayed. The herd will have its trading status suspended when it becomes overdue for being out of test. When the suspension is then applied, moves directly to slaughter will still be permitted.

3. A PVP is scheduled to carry out a TB test but becomes unavailable due to COVID19 related issues (e.g. self isolation, cocooning or critical staff shortages within the practice).

The PVP should inform the farmer and the RVO at the earliest opportunity and try to arrange for an alternative PVP from the practice to carry out the test. If this is not possible, the RVO in consultation with the original PVP may contact a PVP from another practice to carry out the test. If these alternative arrangements are not possible, the test can be delayed. The herd will have its trading status suspended when it becomes overdue for being out of test. When the suspension is then applied, moves directly to slaughter will still be permitted.

4. If a TB test is delayed due to COVID19 related issues, as in 1-3 above:

The delay in testing will not be a basis for referring the farmer for possible cross-compliance action. If the delayed test is a DAFM-paid test, a delay due to COVID19 will not be grounds to make it a farmer-paid test.

5. If it is not possible to test every animal while observing the appropriate social distance:

- The PVP should submit the test report with untested animals accompanied by note “unable to restrain”.
- Where there are untested animals which ought normally to have been tested, the RVO will suspend the herd and list a Miscellaneous Animal Test to the testing vet/practice.
- The vet can then make arrangements to test the remaining cattle when adequate restraint to allow social distancing has been provided – this may involve use of a pen with a restraining head gate.

Follow best practice and HSE Guidelines on Hygiene

For your own protection and the protection of others, people involved in TB Testing must be familiar with the HSE guidelines especially:

- Wash your hands frequently – especially having been in contact with surfaces used by others
- Practice good respiratory hygiene, - when coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – discard tissue immediately.
- Maintain physical distancing, that is, leave at least a 2 metre distance between yourself and other people
- If that is not possible attempt to maintain 1M physical distancing
- Consider the use of a mask or a face shield
- Do not shake hands
- Avoid crowded places especially indoors
- Reduce the number of people you meet.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.