

Is Your Dog Imported from Outside the UK?

Has your dog bred with a dog that has spent time outside the UK?

Did either of your dog's parents spend time outside the UK?

If you have answered 'YES' to any of these Questions, please read on.....

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. In the last few years there have been a number of 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 reportable to APHA (the government Animal and Plant Health Agency).

All Veterinary Practices in the UK are therefore being asked to be on the lookout 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 joint pain but more severe symptoms occur in some individuals.

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 contact with an infected individual. This is why we need to wait until your dog has been in the UK for at least 3 months before testing – if they were exposed in the weeks before travel, even if they were tested negative by the rescue transporting them, they could still become positive after arrival.

Why are Scott Veterinary Clinic telling me this?

As always, we want you, our clients, to be fully informed but also, we at Scotts, alongside other clinics in the UK, have implemented 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). We can only accept a negative test that was sent to an approved external laboratory (eg the APHA) 3 months after arrival in the UK. If your dog's negative test was done before travel, or within 3 months of arrival, then unfortunately we will need you to retest your dog in order for us to confirm negative status.
- Our vets will advise you to have your dog tested for Brucellosis. The blood will be sent to the APHA laboratory and takes 1-2wks for results. At the time of writing, **the cost of this blood test is £130.30.**
- The test is advisory, not 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 you are an existing client, we will have to wear PPE (mask, gloves, visor or other eye protection) every time we see your dog(s) and a cost will be added to any future consultation for this (at present, this is set at £5.50). If your dog needs to be hospitalised, an intensive hospital charge will be charged as your dog will have to be in our isolation kennel and our rigorous infectious disease isolation protocol will have to be implemented. This will include an emergency 'SNAP' blood test for Brucella on site. A SNAP test will also be required if urine tests are needed. This test costs £121.60 and takes less than an hour to run but is much less reliable than the blood test recommended above – a positive test will be considered to be positive as far as a risk to our staff is concerned but can be checked by further testing at APHA as above. Unfortunately, these SNAP tests can give many false negatives so a negative result from this in-house test cannot be relied on. Hence we will then send further blood away for the full tests at APHA (further £130.30).
- **If the APHA test is negative**, no further action will be required.
- If you require an **official** certificate from APHA there is a charge of around £20 plus VAT.
- See below for what happens if the test is positive:

If your dog tests positive for Brucellosis then because it is an officially reportable disease, we have to report this to the Government via the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). The APHA will then contact you. Unfortunately, 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), therefore it is likely that APHA will recommend your dog is euthanased. We understand how upsetting this would be, but it truly is the safest thing to do for everyone. This is a strong recommendation, however if you decide not to carry this out then treatment including months of antibiotics and neutering will be advised to reduce spread but, as above, this is unlikely to eliminate the disease and the surcharges above will be charged during any consultation to protect our staff. Here at Scott Veterinary Clinic we will only provide a limited health service to positive dogs which does not include high risk procedures such as surgery, due to the risk to our staff. We can give you

advice on management at home - you would need to severely restrict the contact your dog has with other dogs, people and children, and avoid walking them in public places. We would talk you through all of these factors and would provide further information on what health service we would offer to help you with your decision if you were in the very difficult situation of receiving a positive result for your dog.

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 a dog from abroad, whether from a breeder or charity, please make sure they are tested as negative for Brucella (as well as the other foreign diseases such as Leishmaniasis, Erlichia and Heartworm) before travel, and be prepared to repeat testing 3 months after arrival in the UK. By working together we hope to stop this disease from increasing further in the UK and prevent it from becoming endemic. More details about Brucella canis can be found on the DEFRA website <http://apha.defra.gov.uk/documents/surveillance/diseases/Canine-Brucellosis-Summary-Final-260421.pdf>

Please contact us if you have any questions

Yours Faithfully