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DECEMBER 2023 NEWSLETTER

Opening Hours Over Christmas & New Year

Monday 25 th Dec (Christmas Day)	CLOSED – EMERGENCIES ONLY
Tuesday 26 th Dec (Boxing Day)	CLOSED – EMERGENCIES ONLY
Wednesday 27 th Dec	8.30am-5.30pm
Thursday 28 th Dec	8.30am-5.30pm
Friday 29 th Dec	8.30am-5.30pm
Saturday 30 th Dec	9.00am-1.00pm
Sunday 31 st Dec	CLOSED – EMERGENCIES ONLY
Monday 1 st Jan	CLOSED – EMERGENCIES ONLY



LEAD POISONING ALERT – APHA have put out an alert following two significant incidents relating to lead shot. In one, sheep had been grazing a pasture which had been heavily contaminated with lead shot following a period of several years when the pasture had been adjacent to an area used for **clay shooting**. Several lambs died from acute lead toxicity and restrictions were placed on the remainder of the group. In a separate cattle incident, an entire group of 48 fattening animals either died from lead poisoning or were euthanised. The source in this case was contaminated maize silage. Lead shot from a clay shoot had become trapped in the hollow between the maize leaf and stem and had then become incorporated into the maize silage.

There has been an increase in the provision of clay pigeon shooting as farms look to diversify. In many shoots, stainless steel shot has replaced the use of lead shot, but the amount of lead shot still being used is uncertain. If there are shoots near the area where animals graze, or where forage is harvested, then it is advisable for the livestock keeper to check that lead contamination of those areas is not occurring.

REMINDER: Veterinary Attestation Deadline 13th December 2023

For all farms selling stock to slaughter, it will be compulsory to have a Veterinary Attestation Number (VAN) from 13/12/2023. This VAN must be allocated by a vet who has seen your stock in the last 12 months. If your stock has not been seen recently, the visit can be in combination with other routine calls such as Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, sheep/ goat prescription checks or at a TB test. We will be issuing these as fast as possible but please be patient as we will need to complete the forms for all applicant farms.

Bluetongue Virus in the UK – BTV has been diagnosed via screening in a small number of animals over at least 3 premises in the South East of England. For your awareness, last month's NPVG newsletter details the clinical signs. The virus affects ruminants including cattle, sheep or goats. It is spread by biting midges (*Culicoides*).

CHANGING PHONE LINE OPTIONS AT NPVG – From **8th January 2024**, we will be changing the phone system to **separate farm and small animal calls**. Please listen to the new options and select accordingly. We have made this decision to offer a more efficient and streamlined service to both our farm and companion animal clients.

TB: A Review of the Disease Process and the Testing PLUS A NEW APHA STUDY

This article was written to answer some FAQs and provide clarity regarding TB testing. TB is a complex issue; this article covers the basics about the disease process and why the testing methods are used.

Mycobacterium bovis is the bacteria that causes bovine TB. It is **slow growing** and can take years to cause visible symptoms in cattle. Infected cattle can **spread it to other cattle, wildlife and humans**. It is **Notifiable** and therefore testing is mandatory for UK herds.

The immune system responds differently to TB infection compared with other infectious disease (e.g. IBR, BVD, Neospora etc), meaning we must use different testing methods to identify the infection.

A TB **skin test** measures cattle's **immune response** to the injected tuberculin (protein from TB bacteria). Leaving 72 hours (+/- 4 hours) before reading the test allows the skin to respond to the injection in a meaningful and standardised way. We inject 2 types of protein: **avian on top and bovine on the bottom**. This provides a **comparison** between similar bacterial protein to prevent cattle with Johne's disease or excessive immune responses being misdiagnosed as TB reactors. (Johne's disease is caused by another *Mycobacterium* species).

The skin test is **over 99% specific**, meaning that there are **very few false positives**. It is approximately **80% sensitive**, meaning it may produce **false negatives** (i.e., clear skin tests for animals that have got TB).

It should be noted that an **Inconclusive Reactor (IR)** is more likely to become a reactor in her lifetime than an animal that has never had an IR result. From the day of infection, it takes from 6 weeks up to several months for an animal to become positive on the skin test. The animal will be positive for a variable amount of time, then may never react again despite having a TB infection. It is relatively common for a **cull cow**, who has never been an IR or is a resolved IR, to have TB lesions in the slaughterhouse. This is because she was infected several months before she was next tested for TB. By then her immune response had quietened and she had become "**anergic**". These anergic animals can be the **source of infection** in the herd, causing positive skin tests in other animals but not becoming a reactor themselves. This is part of the reason why it has recently become mandatory to go from annual to **6-monthly TB testing** for "high risk" farms.

In the **slaughterhouse**, whole carcasses are examined by eye for **TB lesions**. If seen, they are cultured to be certain that they find *Mycobacterium bovis* as the cause of the lesion, rather than it being a scar or an abscess etc. Organs that have large surface area i.e., skin and gut can be thoroughly checked without needing dissection. Lungs, livers, udders, heads etc are sliced and the cross-sections are assessed, however the **lesions may be small or even microscopic** and therefore missed, especially in the **early stages** of the disease. No Visible Lesions (NVL) does not mean that the animal did not have TB.

NEW TESTS The **Gamma blood test** (triggered according to APHA guidelines) is **more sensitive (90%)** than the skin test. It is used to **detect cattle that do not react to the skin test** e.g. anergic animals. There are 2 more blood (antibody) tests currently approved by the World Organisation for Animal Health. The APHA are currently coordinating a study into these tests in England and Wales. The tests have the advantage that they can be **used in animals less than 6 months old**, but are not as sensitive as the skin or the Gamma tests. They are **most effective if the animals are sampled 10-30 days after a skin test** has been performed. Eligible farms (new and recurrent/ persistent breakdowns that are required to have Gamma blood testing) will be **contacted for participation** in this study by APHA. A second blood sample will be taken at the Gamma test and any **positive reactors must be removed from the herd** regardless of skin or Gamma test outcome, receiving the usual compensation. It is optional to partake in the study and we are happy to advise on whether there are advantages for your herd to undergo extra testing.

If you would like to discuss TB with a vet or to organise a **FREE TB Advisory Service (TBAS) visit**, please contact the practice.



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