

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on bTB in Camelids

Advice for Camelid Owners in Wales

These are provided in good faith for guidance. You must seek the advice of your vet if you suspect your alpaca has TB.

1 What symptoms should I be looking for?

There may be no visible symptoms at all. There is no single symptom, or combination of symptom that indicates infection. A cough or breathing difficulties may be symptomatic of other diseases. The commonest cause of weight loss is parasites. However, any alpaca living in an area where TB is a problem (hotspot) should be regarded as potentially having the disease.

The first indication can be that the animal is simply 'not right'. Symptoms may include:

- Lethargy
- Not keeping up with the herd
- Being isolated from the herd
- Weight loss (which can be rapid)
- Coughing
- Tendency to be unstable, especially when sitting down or getting up
- Raised temperature
- **Or none of the above**

2 What should I do if I suspect TB?

The first action is to call your vet.

The affected animal should be isolated, ideally with a companion which you should be prepared to sacrifice if necessary.

3 How can I protect my animals from getting TB?

The best way is by maintaining good husbandry and good biosecurity. Alpacas can catch TB from other infected alpacas (nose-to-nose contact). **Outside matings and visiting studs are therefore a potential risk** (see point 4). There is at present no reliable test to prove an alpaca is free from TB. You need therefore to assess the level of risk to your alpacas. Animals living in a TB hotspot present an increased risk. Mixing with infected alpacas at close quarters (e.g. a show) presents an increased risk. TB is unlikely to be disclosed by your routine quarantine period, however long this may be. Stress can cause the disease to erupt.

TB can also be caught from other wildlife such as badgers, deer and rodents, from other infected livestock such as cattle, goats and sheep, and from cats and dogs.

To prevent contact between these animals and your camelids you can take the following measures:

- Feed and water troughs should be lifted off the ground.
- Animals should never be fed on the ground.
- Secure feed stores in closed metal bins. Installing strand wire electric fencing can be effective but is very expensive and badgers can dig underneath it. Badgers will chew the plastic-type electric fence.
- Ensure that hay and straw are kept out of contact with cats and rodents.
- Control vermin.
- Install wildlife-proof fencing.
- Ensure there is a gap of at least 3 metres between fences with neighbouring livestock.

- Make sure fences are secure.
- Do not overstock the available pasture and rotate grazing.
- Keep animals in small stable groups.
- Reduce stress as much as possible during handling.
- Pasture disinfection is not effective.

Consult the Welsh Assembly Government website regarding tuberculosis husbandry advice
<http://www.wales.gov.uk/bovinetb>

Other livestock on your holding (Cattle, goats, etc) have to be separated prior to any outbreak if you want them to be treated as separate units. Separate groups of animals *may* be treated as separate herds as long as they are authorised by the local Animal Health Office as such **prior** to any disease outbreak. This is, in any case, reassessed at the time of an outbreak.

4 What do I do if I want to purchase alpacas or move animals for breeding or use drive-by matings?

Carefully research any purchase or mating arrangements. This includes females that your male is visiting, or males that are visiting your females. Currently there is no TB test for camelids that is one hundred per cent reliable. Inter-farm movement for breeding will raise the disease risk factor. Research the seller's/breeders herd carefully and assess the risk. Any alpaca living in a TB hotspot presents an increased risk. For matings, the risk can be two ways. TB is unlikely to be disclosed by your routine quarantine period, however long this may be.

5 One of my animals has died should I do a post mortem?

Yes.

A post mortem is very strongly recommended for any death. The case should be discussed with your vet and, if referred by him/her, the animal should be taken to the Veterinary Laboratory Agency (VLA). It is strongly recommended that deaths are reported to the BAS registry. Information will be treated sensitively.

6 Is it OK to bury a dead animal on the farm?

No, this is banned under the Animal By-Products legislation.

The vet has to notify Animal Health of the death if TB is suspected or confirmed.

Some vets will not deal with dead animals for biosecurity reasons and the owner will have to transport the carcass to the VLA laboratory for examination.

7 I have had a post mortem and it has come back positive for TB (not sure what type), what should I do now, what happens now? Animal Health have sent me/ told me on the phone that I am under restriction for TB. What does this mean? What happens next?

You will be served with an Article 17 Standstill Notice. No movements will be allowed either on or off the farm until a way forward has been agreed with Animal Health and a testing regime has been introduced. Movement restrictions will not be lifted until such time as your herd has been designated clear of TB.

8 Animal Health say they want to come and test my animals. What should I do?

Animal Health should be asked why they wish to test the herd.

In the current absence of a compensation order, Animal Health will offer you a compensation payment of £1,500 for stud male and female alpacas and £750 for other male alpacas which are identified as test reactors and slaughtered for TB control purposes. This payment will be subject to a number of conditions including the release to Animal Health for slaughter and post-mortem examination of any animals that may be identified as reactors (infected) by the skin and, if applicable, the ancillary blood test.

In Wales, the Tuberculosis (Testing and Powers of Entry) Wales 2008 prescribed TB for the purposes of section 62D of the Animal Health Act 1981 and provides specific powers in Wales for inspectors to enter land and to obtain a warrant for the purposes of testing for disease. The Order applies to camelids as well as cattle, sheep, goats and all other ruminating animals and swine.

9 Who pays for testing?

Animal Health will arrange and cover the cost of testing.

10 Animal Health say I am a 'contiguous herd' and wants to come and test my herd. What should I do now?

A contiguous herd is one that is near and adjoining or neighbouring holding which has suffered a TB breakdown. Animal Health should be given every assistance.

11 What does the test involve? How do they do it? What facilities do I have to provide?

Animals should be placed in a small holding pen.

Handlers should be available to hold the animal.

The vet will test intra-dermally (into the skin) for bovine TB in the right armpit and avian TB in the left armpit. If the reaction to avian TB is greater than that to bovine TB, the animal is considered to be negative to bovine TB.

The reaction area will be carefully measured with callipers to ensure there is no doubt about the size of reaction.

Some vets will clip the fleece from the test area but others consider that this is a source of skin irritation.

12 If the animals test positive, will they just shoot them there and then?

An appointment will be made for the animal to be culled.

An injection can be requested rather than the animal being shot.

Slaughtering will be on the farm and the carcass will then be removed.

13 I am under restriction from Animal Health but would prefer not to test. I don't want to breed, sell or show. What harm am I doing letting my animals die of old age or TB, whichever is the sooner?

If an animal in the herd has TB, it may pass it to others.

The quality of the animal's life may well be impaired.

An infected herd forms a source of infection for all neighbouring livestock and wildlife.

Consider the risk to yourself and other animals on your farm and also to your neighbours and wildlife. If you choose to keep animals alive, closely monitor them for signs of distress and ask your vet to do the same.

You have a duty of care to yourself, your animals and to wildlife and culling is recommended.

Don't encourage a potential source of infection.

The chance of a positive skin test in an unaffected animal is minimal so testing is recommended with any animal testing positive being culled.

14 Where are the current TB hot spots?

See the latest position on the Defra website <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalhealth/managing-disease/TB/pti/index.htm>

15 Can I vaccinate my animals against TB?

There is no vaccine available for camelids.