



Animal &  
Plant Health  
Agency

## APHA Briefing Note 32/25

# Voluntary Interferon-gamma (IFN-γ) blood testing in England

Date issued: 19 August 2025

## Purpose

1. To inform Official Veterinarians (OVs), Authorised Tuberculin Testers (ATTs) and OV practices testing in England that APHA will offer government funded interferon-gamma (IFN-γ) TB blood sampling from 1<sup>st</sup> September. This offer applies to keepers of breakdown herds in the High Risk Area (HRA) and six-monthly surveillance testing parts of the Edge Area of England where the Officially Tuberculosis Free status has been withdrawn (OTFW) and who do not qualify for compulsory IFN-γ testing.

## Background

1. The IFN-γ TB blood test is a supplementary blood test conducted in TB breakdown herds alongside the tuberculin skin test to increase sensitivity. IFN-γ testing is an integral part of the government's strategy to achieve officially TB free status for England by 2038.
2. In England, IFN-γ testing is compulsory in the following cases:
  - a. **all new** OTFW TB incidents in the **Low Risk Area (LRA)** and **annual** surveillance testing parts of the **Edge Area**
  - b. **recurrent** OTFW TB incidents in the **HRA** and **six-monthly** surveillance testing parts of the **Edge Area**
  - c. OTFW herds experiencing **chronic** or **persistent** OTFW breakdowns

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- d. **whole or partial slaughter** of TB breakdown herds where IFN-γ testing is used to inform decisions and assess any remaining animals
  - e. other **ad-hoc** scenarios in breakdown herds where APHA considers there is merit in test deployment.
3. Private IFN-γ testing is also available in England, subject to authorisation by APHA.

## What's changing?

1. From 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025, APHA will offer government funded IFN-γ testing to cattle keepers of OTFW breakdown herds located in the HRA and Edge Area that do not qualify for compulsory IFN-γ testing.
2. From the above date, APHA will write (Annex 1) to all cattle keepers of new OTFW breakdowns not qualifying for compulsory IFN-γ testing to inform them of the opportunity to apply for voluntary IFN-γ testing.
3. Although keepers of ongoing OTFW breakdown herds will not be written to, they can also apply provided they are not:
  - a. pending just one clear SIT and their last skin test did not disclose any reactors
  - b. only pending an IR retest, or
  - c. awaiting a TB10 (notice lifting restrictions) pending the submission of a keeper completed BT05 (cleansing and disinfection declaration).
4. Other requirements or conditions applicable for voluntary IFN-γ testing are:
  - a. the test must include the entire herd by default, testing individual animals or selected groups will not be permitted. Any exceptions must be approved by an APHA vet
  - b. that once keepers agree the test dates with APHA, they must present their animals for testing. Changes will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances (e.g. severe weather or emergencies)
  - c. that availability depends on APHA's capacity to deliver any agreed testing. Compulsory testing will continue to take priority. APHA may have to delay or reschedule voluntary tests as required
  - d. that at any point, APHA may require a compulsory IFN-γ test depending on how the TB breakdown progresses. This would be a statutory requirement and not subject to the voluntary conditions outlined in this briefing note
  - e. no retesting will be offered for animals that test positive; they will be removed under current TB control rules, subject to compensation in line with current policy.

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5. This voluntary testing offer applies to a single round only. However, cattle keepers may reapply for further rounds, subject to availability and meeting eligibility criteria.
6. APHA recommends that cattle keepers discuss the offer with their private veterinary surgeons (PVS) to help them to understand how the test may fit into their herd's health plan before requesting a voluntary IFN-y test from APHA.
7. The private IFN testing option will remain available to cattle keepers in England.

## Action and Further Information

1. OVs are encouraged to inform cattle keepers of the availability of voluntary IFN-y testing and point them to the information available on the [TB Hub website](#).
2. If, following discussions, it is considered that a breakdown herd could benefit from a voluntary IFN-y test, cattle keepers should be referred to APHA to raise their request **from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025**.

## Further Information

1. Detailed information about IFN-y blood testing can be found on the [TB Hub website](#).

# ANNEX 1

## Voluntary Interferon-gamma Supplementary Bovine Tuberculosis Testing

### Animal Health Act 1981

### The Tuberculosis in Animals (England) Order 2021

#### Why You Are Receiving This Letter

Your herd has been identified as being potentially eligible for voluntary interferon-gamma (IFN- $\gamma$ ) blood testing. This is a supplementary TB test offered to herds that have had their Officially TB Free status withdrawn (OTFW) but do not currently qualify for compulsory gamma testing.

#### What This Means for You

You can choose to have your herd tested using the gamma blood test. This test helps identify TB-infected animals that may not be picked up by the standard skin test (SICCT).

#### Key Points to Know

- Whole Herd Testing Only:

Voluntary gamma testing must include the entire herd by default. Testing individual animals or selected groups will not be permitted. Any exceptions must be approved by an APHA vet.

- Test Commitment:

Once you agree to a test date with APHA, you must present your animals for testing. Changes will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances (e.g. severe weather or emergencies).

- Test Results:

- Animals that test positive will be removed under TB control rules.
- Compensation will be provided in line with current policy.
- No retesting will be offered for animals that test positive.

- Availability:

Voluntary testing depends on APHA's capacity. Compulsory testing will continue to take priority. APHA may delay or reschedule voluntary tests as required.

- Supplementary Test:

The gamma test supports, but does not replace, the standard skin test (SICCT), which remains the main statutory test.

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- Eligibility:

Herds will not be eligible if they are:

- pending just one clear short interval test (SIT) and they have not had any reactors at their last skin test
- only pending an inconclusive reactor (IR) retest, or
- awaiting a TB10 lifting restrictions notice pending the submission of a BT05 cleansing and disinfection declaration

### **Important Note**

At any point, depending on the progress of your TB breakdown, APHA may require a compulsory gamma test. This compulsory gamma test would be a statutory requirement and not subject to the voluntary conditions outlined here.

### **Next Steps**

Before deciding on a voluntary gamma test and subsequently approaching APHA, we strongly recommend discussing this offer with your Private Veterinary Surgeon (PVS). They (PVS) can help you understand how this test could fit into your herd's health plan.

If you wish to proceed, please contact APHA using the details at the top of this letter or email [TB.Advice@apha.gov.uk](mailto:TB.Advice@apha.gov.uk). An APHA team member will then contact you to arrange the test.

### **Additional Information**

Blood samples may also be used for routine research. Blood samples used for routine research will not affect your test results.

More details about gamma testing are available on the next page and at:

<https://tbhub.co.uk/tb-testing-cattle/blood-testing/interferon-gamma-blood-testing-of-cattle>

Yours sincerely

Name

Incident Management Team, TB Customer Service Centre

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## Gamma Blood Test – Practicalities That You Need to Know

### Why Timing Matters

- The earlier the gamma test is done, the more useful it can be.
- Early testing may help reduce the time your herd is under TB restrictions.
- Where possible, the test should be completed before your next short interval test.

### Which Animals Are Tested

- Only cattle aged **six months or older** are eligible.
- APHA staff will bring a list of animals to be tested.

### Preparing Your Animals

- Animals must be **safely restrained** to allow access to the **tail** for blood collection.
- In some cases, blood may need to be taken from the **neck**. These animals must be haltered or tethered.
- All animals must have a **readable ear tag**. Please check this before the visit.

### Preparing Your Facilities

- Provide **safe access to the rear of the crush** — no climbing over gates.
- Ensure **no animals can approach from behind** the tester.
- When released, animals should exit into a space **away from testers and equipment**.
- Testing should be done in a clean and dry environment, ideally **under cover in a well-lit area**.
- If not possible, a **livestock trailer** next to the crush can be used to keep equipment and paperwork dry and clean.
- Please provide a **table or flat surface** for paperwork and equipment.

### During the Visit

- Two or more testers will attend..
- Blood samples are stored in a **temperature-controlled box** that must be kept **warm, dry, and clean**.
- Testers need **easy access** to animals, equipment, and paperwork.

### After the Test

- Samples are sent to the lab by **courier the same day**.
- If the courier is delayed and samples are left on farm, **contact APHA immediately**.
- Results are usually available **within one week** — please do not contact APHA for updates.

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- You will be informed of **the results**, particularly of:
  - Any **positive results**
  - If **resampling** is needed (this is normal for this type of test)

#### **Important Note on Medication**

- Do **not give routine medicines** before or during testing unless urgently needed.
- Some medicines can delay the removal of animals that test positive.
- If an animal is within a **medicine withdrawal period**, it may need to be **slaughtered on farm**.

More details about gamma testing are available at: <https://tbhub.co.uk/tb-testing-cattle/blood-testing/interferon-gamma-blood-testing-of-cattle>