



# **Brucellosis - an emerging disease in the UK dog population**

Was your dog imported into the UK? If so please read on...

Taking on a rescue dog from abroad is becoming more and more common and can be very rewarding for owners, however sadly there is increased risk of these dogs carrying certain diseases that can be a risk to them, other dogs and also their owners and veterinary staff.

Sometimes dogs can be carriers of these diseases without showing signs, but can still pass the disease onto other animals and people.

One such disease is Brucellosis which this article will discuss in more depth.

## **What is Brucellosis?**

*Brucella Canis* is a bacteria which causes disease in both dogs and people. It can cause disease processes like fever, abortion and is rarely fatal. It is transmitted mainly via breeding, vaginal discharge, semen, urine and other bodily fluids.

*Brucella Canis* is common in some parts of the world, however until recently it was very rare in the UK. Before 2020 there were only 3 cases diagnosed in the UK, in the 1st 6 months of 2023 alone there were 97 cases.

All UK cases have been in dogs that have either been imported, have mated with an imported dog, have had contact with the birthing products of an imported dog, or are the offspring (puppy) of an imported dog. The vast majority of these have been imported from Eastern Europe where Brucellosis is endemic.

With this increase in cases and the possibility of spread between dogs and to humans this disease is now reportable to APHA (the government Animal and Plant Health Agency) and they have asked Veterinarians to be on the lookout for cases.

## **How is it diagnosed?**

Dogs can carry *Brucella Canis* sometimes for years without showing signs, and when they do show clinical signs they can be fairly vague and non-specific. As a result a blood test is needed to diagnose Brucellosis.

A lot of charities importing these animals carry out blood tests before they come to the UK, however falsely negative results are common as antibodies (which is what the test looks for) do not develop for up to 3 months after infection so retesting 3-6 months (or even 12 months in puppies) after arriving in the UK is recommended by APHA.

## **What is the risk to me?**

If you own a dog that has been imported from a country where *Brucella* is endemic you are at higher risk of getting Brucellosis than the general population, but there are things you can do to limit the risk.

The first and most important thing is to get your dog tested, this will let you know if your dog is a carrier.

If your dog has a positive result we will discuss options with you; personal hand hygiene, protective gloves and possibly other PPE as well as neutering your dog are the best ways to protect yourself and your family from *Brucella Canis*.

The risk to breeders and to veterinary staff is higher and as such we have to implement policies for interacting with imported dogs.

## **What is Paragon Vets policy for imported dogs?**

Any dog originating from high risk areas (Americas, Asia, Africa, Eastern and Central Europe) must provide evidence of a negative serology for Brucellosis taken at an appropriate time after entry into the UK. This can be brought in person or sent via PetsApp.



If this testing has not been done or has been done before entry into the UK we will require your pet to have a blood sample taken for testing after they have been in the UK for 3-12 months.

A blood sample is taken from the dog and sent for analysis, this takes 7-21 working days before we get results.

Testing is not currently a legal requirement, but we have implemented this to reduce the risk to our staff and clients, if you do not have your imported dog tested, we will, sadly, be forced to request that you seek alternative veterinary care.

If your dog returns a positive test we would (at the time of writing) still undertake to provide veterinary care for you and your pet. We would work with you to decide on the best course of action. What we could offer would be veterinary services, but with specific staff safety measures in place which would be explained to you, and from a reduced pool of veterinary staff. In addition, we would not be able to offer certain higher-risk procedures such as scaling and polishing of teeth.

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