

Hello and welcome to the March Newsletter.

This month we are concentrating on Health and Safety, particularly during TB testing. We have had a few incidents in the last couple of weeks involving concussion and scalp wounds

TB testing is a necessary evil. We appreciate that it is extremely stressful for you, the farmer, and often involves you paying for additional help, totally disrupting two days of your week, moving animals around – bringing them in and feeding them, handling unwilling animals and of course, the worry of the consequences of the results. Obviously, the outcome of the test can lead to financial losses and upset.

The test is also quite stressful for the vet – trying to do a good job within the standard operating procedure (SOP) while staying safe, aware of the possibility of a ministry vet turning up at any time to carry out an audit. We also worry about the result – a few of us have had TB on our own farms and understand the uncertainty and worry, financial implications and disruption to the business. Another worry can be what reaction we will get from the farmer regarding a positive reaction when we report a result. We know that we are reporting a *fact* – the *fact* that your animal has reacted to the test in a certain way. I don't like to think of my colleagues, maybe more so the junior vets, feeling under pressure to change that *fact*, and do not expect this to happen. All our employees have the full backing of the practice owners.



The SOP for the TB test is strict and must be adhered to, and this includes the safety of all personnel involved. When we are working on farm, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) look at Employment Law – so that the Practice is responsible for the safety of the vet (+/- student) and the farmer is responsible for him/herself and any farm workers. However, as the 'professional' present, if the vet thinks that something is dangerous, even if it does not directly affect them, the test will be abandoned. The HSE would not look very favourably on the vet if they had been aware of a dangerous practice and not done something about it – as would a court of law. An Abandonment of Test Notice is served – unless the dangerous practice can be resolved there and then. If a test is abandoned, we will endeavour to rebook you as soon as the problem has been resolved. However, you will be charged for the visits over and above the usual included in the test.

Whenever we go on farm, we are mentally carrying out a checklist of potential health and safety problems – a risk assessment. Obviously, painful experience helps so you may have more demands and suggestions from more experienced vets. If your set up has any odd quirks, please point them out to us asap.

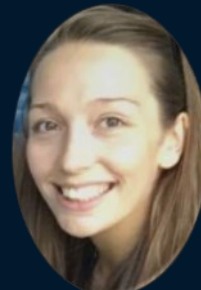
Another issue with TB tests is – what is a reasonable speed of testing? We all know that you cannot be impatient with

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animals – the greater ‘rush’ you are in, the longer it takes! The speed of testing is directly determined by the efficiency of the facilities, with the temperament of the animals having an effect also. We are paid a flat rate per head for the test with a single transport charge. It is a reasonable rate for a reasonable test – you win some, you lose some. Every now and then, due to unforeseen circumstances, one farm or another has an unexpected issue, despite best practices. However, where the facilities and personnel provided lead to unacceptable testing time, if we are unable to test a minimum of ~20 animals per hour, we will charge for the additional time taken. We are not trying to diddle anyone, and I do not think that we will have to do this often – we would just like to be able to carry out your test in a timely and safe manner.

If you are considering purchasing new equipment or rejigging your existing facilities, we have a wealth of experience of many many types of crushes and set ups and would be very happy to help.

Mary

Some points to consider for cattle handling & TB testing

There are numerous tips and articles available on how to design a cattle handling system, this is one we found: [Design cattle handling systems to fit purpose, farmers advised - FarmingUK News](#)



On the left is an example of an excellent handling system, completely safe as nobody has to actually go in the pen with the cattle. Whilst some of our farmers do have systems like these, we recognise that they are not within everyone’s price bracket nor indicated for smaller herds.

The handling system on the right is a mobile system owned by a livestock services contractor that some of our clients have used. Especially useful in the summer months when cattle are out and also comes with an experienced stockman to help. Please contact us at the surgery if you would like contact details



As vets we need access to the middle third of the neck for the TB test. The animals must be restrained in a manner that allows this access but prevents sideways movement of either their body (a crush risk) or their head.

Minimum requirements:

- The crush must have a floor – cattle can walk off with it otherwise
- The crush must be attached to a solid object—the 3 point linkage of a tractor counts
- Ensure the yoke is secure and will not spring open—we have had incidents of the yoke springing open and the handle hitting people on the head
- A secure front gate that will not spring open when hit by an animal at pace
- A pin through the hinge of the back gate to prevent animals lifting it off the hinges
- Secure holding pen—if cattle escape or tested and untested cattle mix it means putting everything through again

If you have any concerns regarding your handling facilities or would like any advice please feel free to contact us.

Office opening hours

Monday – Friday (Except Bank Holidays)

8.30am - 5.30pm

Emergency out of hours service

Weeknights 5.30pm - 8.30am

Saturday & Sunday all day