Brucellosis Infection in Dogs - Information for Owners

Understanding *Brucella canis*

Brucella canis is an uncommon bacterial infection found in dogs in the UK. However, as more dogs are being imported or rescued from overseas, veterinary practices are seeing more cases than in previous years. The infection is more common in parts of the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Eastern or Central Europe.

At Nova Vets, we understand that discussions about infectious diseases can feel worrying or unexpected. Our aim is always to support you, your pet, and your family with clear information, compassionate guidance, and safe veterinary care.

Most dogs that are tested for *Brucella canis* do not have the infection. Testing simply helps us provide the safest possible care for your dog, other animals, our veterinary team, and the wider community.

What is canine brucellosis?

Canine brucellosis is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria *Brucella canis*. The infection most commonly affects the reproductive system, but it can also cause other health problems.

The bacteria can enter the body through the mouth, during mating, or from mother to puppies before or during birth. The most common route of infection is through contact with infected reproductive fluids during mating. The bacteria may also be present in urine and birthing fluids.

Brucellosis is considered a zoonotic disease, which means it can, in rare cases, infect people. For most pet owners, the risk is very low. However, people who encounter birthing fluids or reproductive material and other bodily fluids may be at higher risk.

What signs might an infected dog show?

Many dogs with *Brucella canis* show no obvious signs of illness, which is why testing can sometimes be important.

In female dogs

The most common sign is pregnancy loss or abortion. In some cases, puppies may be born alive but sadly pass away shortly after birth. Some puppies that survive may still carry the infection.

Owners may also notice:

- A prolonged vaginal discharge
- Signs of infertility
- Previous unexplained pregnancy loss

Sometimes owners may not realise their dog was pregnant, as aborted material may go unnoticed.

In male dogs

Male dogs may experience:

- Infertility or reduced fertility
- Swelling or pain in the testicles or scrotum
- Excessive licking of the area due to discomfort

Other possible signs include back pain, lethargy and weight loss but most dogs remain completely well in appearance despite carrying the infection.

Next Steps

If your dog's history suggests that testing may be recommended, our team will guide you through the process carefully and supportively.

1. Discussing your dog's history

We will ask a few questions about your dog, including:

- Where they originally came from
- When they arrived in the UK
- Any previous breeding or medical history including disease testing

This helps us assess whether testing would be appropriate.

2. Arranging testing

Testing involves taking a blood sample during a pre-arranged appointment. The sample is usually taken from a vein in the neck or leg and sent to a specialist laboratory.

Results are typically available within approximately 7 working days.

3. Receiving the results

Once the results are available, we will contact you to discuss them fully and explain any recommendations or next steps.

Again, most dogs tested will not have *Brucella canis*, but testing helps us provide the safest care possible for everyone involved.

Testing costs

- Blood sample taken by a nurse without a full consultation: £50
- Veterinary consultation to discuss *Brucella canis*, risks, implications, and blood sampling: £99.50

If you are unsure whether your dog requires testing, please contact our team and we will be happy to advise you.

What if my dog has already been tested?

Some rescue organisations and import agencies test dogs before they enter the UK. While this can identify many infected dogs, unfortunately no test is perfect.

There is a period of up to 3 months after infection during which the bacteria may not yet be detectable on a blood test. For this reason, we generally recommend repeat testing approximately 3 months after arrival in the UK.

Dogs should also be at least 1 year old before testing, as maternal antibodies in younger dogs can sometimes affect results.

What if I choose not to test?

If you were to not test your dog for *Brucella canis* in order to protect our staff, then we would need to increase safety measures within the practice treat untested animals with caution using personal protective equipment (PPE) when needed. This may range depending on the risk but could involve gloves or full PPE. For this reason, there may be increased costs associated with hospitalisation and treatment and for certain high-risk procedures such as reproductive surgery or orthopaedic surgery we may not be able to accommodate your pet.

How is canine brucellosis treated?

Unfortunately, there is currently no treatment that can reliably eliminate *Brucella canis* infection completely.

Long courses of antibiotics may sometimes reduce the infection temporarily, but relapses are common, and treatment is not usually recommended routinely in the UK. Even after treatment, there is no reliable way to confirm that the infection has been fully cleared.

To help protect other dogs and people, infected dogs are also advised to avoid close contact with other dogs and may need lifestyle adjustments, including separate exercise and careful management at home.

We appreciate that discussions surrounding positive results can feel overwhelming and emotional. In some situations, difficult decisions may need to be considered, including euthanasia. If this situation ever arises, our team will support you with compassion and honesty throughout.

What is the outlook for infected dogs?

The prognosis for dogs infected with *Brucella canis* is considered guarded. The infection can be difficult to manage long term, and relapses are common.

Many dogs can continue to appear well, but careful management is needed to reduce the risk to other animals and people.

Every case is different, and we will always discuss your dog's individual circumstances with you in detail.

Conclusion

Brucella canis is a serious but uncommon infection in dogs that can be challenging to treat. Although human infection is rare and usually mild, the disease is considered zoonotic, which means precautions are important.

People at higher risk include:

- Pregnant women
- Young children
- Immunocompromised individuals
- Anyone handling birthing materials or reproductive fluids

In the UK, *Brucella canis* is a reportable disease, meaning any positive cases must be reported to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).

We know many owners are hearing about this disease for the first time, and it can understandably feel upsetting or confusing.

Our goal is simply to support you, protect your pet, and ensure the safety of other animals, owners, and our veterinary team. If you have any questions or would like to discuss whether testing may be appropriate for your dog, please contact the practice as we are here to help.

Nova Vets