

Important Information for All Our Adopters and People with Overseas Rescue Dogs

BRUCELLA CANIS

Brucella Canis:

The subject of Brucella Canis (BC) affects many overseas rescue dogs today, including ours, no matter how long they have lived in the UK/been treated by your vet in the past or whether your vet never asked you for a test before, chances are that they may well do so at your next appointment, even if it is only a routine one for vaccinations etc.

Sadly, although repeated guidance from DEFRA and the APHA stresses the low risk the disease poses, a number of vets are still presenting a disproportionate picture of it to their clients.

We wanted to create this write-up to lay out Paws2Freedom's understanding of BC and reassure you that while vets are, of course, at liberty to make their own policies, the information some give to owners can be misleading and disproportionately alarming. Sometimes we have found that it doesn't even align with the most up to date government research.

In recent times some UK veterinary practices have adopted new policies regarding dogs imported from overseas. These new policies are largely because of the increased awareness of Brucella Canis (BC), a bacterium that can cause Brucellosis in dogs. BC is the weakest strain of this condition and is not to be confused with the livestock and wildlife strains, for example, which are much more infectious.

These new vet policies mean that an increasing number of practices are asking owners of imported rescue dogs to test their dogs for Brucella Canis before giving any treatment or care, regardless of whether they have already been tested abroad and regardless of their health, or how long they have been clients at the practice, even including long term client's dogs where they have performed previous surgeries, dentals and other treatments on their dog.

This is of course incredibly worrying for all of us and particularly for adopters of overseas dogs. Your vet may well never bring the issue up, but if they do we want to make sure that you are FULLY informed about BC, rather than just having to rely on the information from your vet. Between dogs, BC is mostly spread through mating or birth. In very rare high-risk situations it can be passed to humans, usually when assisting with whelping or during certain surgeries, eg neutering, but the risk can be controlled by using PPE.

Due to the low risk of infecting other dogs, the part in the official guidance where keeping dogs apart from each other if tested positive was previously recommended, has been removed.

At the time of putting this information together for you, we understand that there have only been 3 cases of BC in humans in the UK have ever been recorded, and only 1 has been lab confirmed.

No human deaths have ever been recorded worldwide and in the rare cases of human infection it can usually be treated with antibiotics (with any disease the immunosuppressed may be worse affected in the unlikely event they contract it).

Unlike other strains of brucellosis, Brucella Canis has not been found to adversely affect fertility or pregnancy.

We are not the BC's natural host, which means that despite its zoonotic risks, infecting a human isn't that quick and easy.

You can read the UKHSA guidance and HAIRS report here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/brucella-canis-information-for-the-public-and-dog-owners/brucella-canis-information-for-the-public-and-dog-owners>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hairs-risk-assessment-brucella-canis/hairs-risk-assessment-brucella-canis>

Our Approach at Paws2Freedom:

From the start we've gone beyond legal import requirements. At this point a dog can legally enter the UK with only a valid rabies vaccine and worming, but that's never felt enough to us. We've always ensured our dogs are:

Fully vaccinated (as we would expect them to be in the UK).

Tested for common diseases including Heartworm, Anaplasmosis, Ehrlichiosis and Lyme disease, Leishmaniasis, Babesia, Giardia and Brucellosis Canis.

Please note that some of these tests have only been introduced in recent years or months, so if your dog was adopted a longer time ago, they may not have been tested for all of them.

Treated for parasites.

Vet-checked before travel and signed off as fit for travel.

Vet-checked again in the UK and provided with extra parasite treatment for future use, and whatever else they may require at the time, as each dog is an individual case.

TESTING METHOD FOR OUR OVERSEAS DOGS - We began testing for Brucella Canis as soon as we became aware of it in late 2022. Bosnia, where most of our current overseas dogs originate from, only offers the SAT part of the test, which checks for active disease.

Recently, since spring 2025 we've found a way to access a more complete test by sending blood samples to VetPro Lab in Serbia, which uses the same dual-part method as the UK APHA test:

SAT - indicates active infection.

IELISA - indicates antibodies from historic exposure (not the same as active infection).

Why This Matters:

A positive iELISA result doesn't necessarily mean a dog is currently infected/has active disease. It's important to remember that, because of the limitations of the tests, if a dog tests positive it does not necessarily mean they are currently infected with the bacteria. It may be a false positive (they are common) or it may just mean historic exposure.

Most false positives happen on the iELISA and a re-test may even produce a negative result.

A dog who tests positive on the iELISA does not tend to display any symptoms and is happy and healthy. However, because the BC bacteria is known to linger and 'hide' in cells, they cannot rule out that it's lying dormant somewhere in the body with the potential for a future 'flare-up'. As such,

to err on the side of caution, a dog is deemed positive if these antibodies are present at significant levels.

A dog who tests negative on re-test will be downgraded on the official register and whether the vet marks your dog down as negative or not, is within their discretion.

Unfortunately, some UK vets regard an iELISA-positive result the same as an active infection and MAY EVEN RECOMMEND EUTHANASIA UNNECESSARILY.

This is why we strongly recommend having a Brucella-sympathetic vet, one who understands the difference and follows current APHA guidance and government risk assessment.

There should be options for you and not just a one way ticket. You can find, or ask for, the frequently updated spreadsheet list for Brucella friendly/unfriendly vet in the Brucella support group below.

If you have adopted an overseas dog from Paws2Freedom prior to us implementing BC testing and also if you have adopted a dog who has been tested with either the SAT test only, or recently the SAT and iELISA testing, chances are that you will be asked to have your dog re-tested before the next vet treatment.

What we must remember is that BC is still relatively rare in the UK and that even if there is a risk of transmission, it will only be a LOW-VERY LOW, for both, dog-dog and dog-human infection. BC doesn't particularly like humans, we are not its natural host. It doesn't spread easily between dogs outside of mating and it's not going to infect us easily.

Helpful resources:

Brucella Canis Information & Support Group UK
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/650418297193552>

Brucella Canis RVN, run by Louise, an incredibly knowledgeable vet nurse who's always happy to advise.
<https://www.facebook.com/BrucellaCanisRVN>

Guidance for our Adopters:

If you adopted from us before late 2022 and don't have a Brucella test certificate, your dog was probably not tested, either on the old or the new test, at the time (BC wasn't yet on the radar back then).

Be prepared:

A number of vets are now asking for a BC test regardless of history, and most vets now ask for a test or a re-test at around 3 months after arrival.

A fair price is usually around £100 (ideally a bit lower), but many vets charge between £120–150 and sadly some we heard of even charge £300+. If that happens, please shop around among Brucella friendly vets.

For new adopters:

Before adopting we would recommend that you talk to your vet about their BC policy in respect of imported dogs. This will save stress later.

You can find very helpful email templates in the Brucella Support Group here:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/brucellacanisinformationsupportgroup/files/files>

Our Promise:

We will never knowingly bring a Brucella-positive dog into the UK.

We test every dog using the most accurate method available to us at the time and will keep adopters fully informed. Our dogs have been through enough and they deserve the best chance at a happy and healthy life here.

We are committed that rescuing and rehoming overseas dogs to the UK can continue and we hope that our support and reassurance will enable our dogs to live their best lives with your family.

FOR OUR ADOPTERS, Paws2Freedom should be your first point of contact if you have any queries at all and we will always help in any way we can.

Final reassurance:

Please always keep in mind that there are a number of dogs who tested positive for BC, living very happy lives in the UK and their lives haven't changed much at all.

You will find a wealth of support in the Facebook groups we've mentioned. If you are not on social media it's worth joining Facebook just for that reason alone, as these groups and Louise's 1-2-1 sessions are the best resource anyone could have.

Please, please do get in touch with our team if this subject concerns you in any way, but also please be reassured that BC is not a common disease and in most cases is mild, if even symptomatic at all. It is also one that, despite the scaremongering that we are often subjected to as overseas-dog parents, needs a proportionate and informed response.

Above all – Please keep calm and remember NOT to put your Paws2Freedom dog to sleep without consulting us first.

At all times your Paws2Freedom team is here to support you and will help you make the right decision based on your situation.

A Message of Gratitude:

Our vet has been amazing, sympathetic and extremely kind. They learned more about Brucella Canis and adapted their policy to reflect the latest understanding. HUGE THANKS to Castle Vets in Launceston and to the wonderful Louise RVN who helped make this happen.

With much love for all the dogs in the world and their amazing people,

from Paws2Freedom ♥