



## **Brucella in dogs – an emerging disease risk**

In recent years, the number of dogs infected with *Brucella canis* in the UK has increased. Of those diagnosed, the vast majority have come from or travelled to countries where Brucella infection is common. It is likely that the import of dogs from Eastern Europe, particularly Romania, has been a major factor in the spread of this disease.

### **What is Brucella?**

In dogs, Brucella can cause reproductive issues such as abortion, infertility, orchitis and uterine infection. There are also reports of its causing back pain, lameness, weakness and fever. Treatment in dogs is not recommended, as infection usually persists despite this.

### **Why the particular concern?**

Brucella is zoonotic, meaning it can be spread from dogs to humans. In people, infection does not always cause symptoms. If symptoms do occur, these can include fever, weight loss, headaches, tiredness, back and joint pain. It is also thought that *Brucella canis* infection could increase the risk of complications in pregnancy.

*Brucella canis* seems to cause less serious effects in humans compared to other types of Brucella and for most people the risk of catching *Brucella canis* is very low. Most contact with an infected dog will not result in human infection but handling infected secretions, particularly reproductive secretions and birthing products presents a higher risk. Immunocompromised people and pregnant women may be at a higher risk.

From a health and safety perspective, dog breeders and others working with dogs (such as vets, vet nurses, kennel workers) are at an increased risk of infection. Consequently, in view of the increasing number of cases, veterinary practices across the UK are putting steps in place to reduce the risk of their staff being exposed to Brucella.

### **What control measures are in place?**

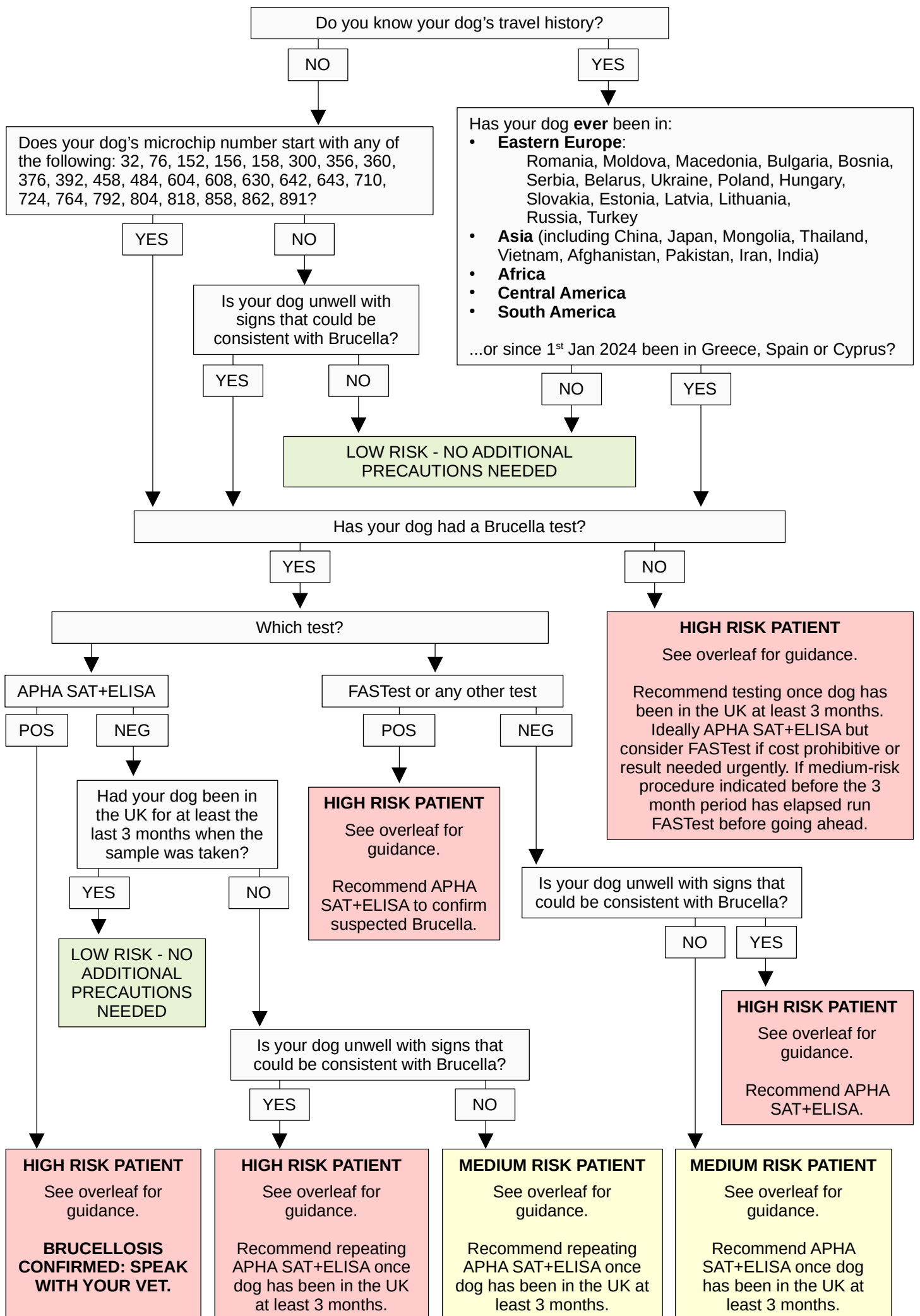
Whilst *Brucella canis* is common in some countries, the UK has previously been free of this disease and the hope is that we can keep it that way. The UK Government has designated Brucella as a reportable disease – cases MUST be reported so spread can be monitored.

Our protocol and policy is intended to identify dogs that have a higher risk of carrying Brucella, to recommend testing of those dogs and to limit staff exposure to dogs who test positive or remain higher-risk patients. To achieve this, we have introduced a decision-making flowchart and control measures including the use of protective clothing and isolation kennels.

We are continuing to monitor the situation and as we learn more about Brucella and the risks it presents, advice may change and our policies and protocols will be regularly reviewed and updated.

For more information speak to one of our vets or visit:

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



## **MEDIUM RISK PATIENTS**

- **Low-risk procedures** can be carried out at Dacre House but staff must wear protective clothing. A £3 surcharge will be applied per visit to cover the cost of this.
- **Medium-risk procedures** can be carried out at Dacre House but staff must wear protective clothing. A £35 surcharge will be applied per procedure to cover the cost of this.
- **High-risk procedures** cannot be performed at Dacre House.
- If hospitalised, patients will be managed in 'isolation'. A surcharge will be applied to cover the cost of this. Patients cannot be admitted if there is any sign of urogenital disease (orchitis, urinary tract infection, pyometra, vaginitis), if the patient is in season or showing signs of pregnancy.

## **HIGH RISK PATIENTS**

- Time spent at the clinic should be kept to a minimum and so a more 'hands-off' approach to veterinary care will be adopted.
- **Low-risk procedures** can be carried out at Dacre House but staff must wear protective clothing. A £3 surcharge will be applied per visit to cover the cost of this.
- **Medium-risk** and **high-risk procedures** cannot be carried out at Dacre House.
- Patients cannot be hospitalised at Dacre House.

**Low-risk procedures:** physical examination, vaccination and other injections, blood sampling, IV catheter placement, administering oral medication, anal gland expression, pedicure, diagnostic imaging.

**Medium-risk procedures:** skin surgery (e.g. wound repair, lump removal), hospitalisation, abdominal surgery (excluding urogenital surgery).

**High-risk procedures:** neutering, pyometra, C-section, joint surgery, joint/CSF taps, dentistry, urine sampling, prostatic wash, urethral catheterisation, fine needle aspirate, post-partum care.

## **TESTING**

There are two testing options available at Dacre House, both at cost-price to encourage testing.

- **APHA SAT+ELISA:**
  - Considered the definitive test with extremely reliable results.
  - Cost (including VAT): £53.12
  - The sample is sent away to be tested.
  - Results can take up to 3 weeks currently though the lab offers a 'fast-track' service for an additional fee.
- **FASTest:**
  - Cheaper and faster but less reliable ("false positives" and "false negatives" can occur).
  - Cost (including VAT): £35.28
  - The sample is tested in-house and results are available same-day.

It can take 3 months from the time of infection for a patient to 'sero-convert', i.e. have a positive test result – so testing less than 3 months after arrival in the UK is not fully reliable.