

October 15, 2018

Further TB testing required on hounds

Dear editor,
We thank O'Halloran et al for their response and, as yet, unpublished data ("bTB in foxhounds: clarifying points of inaccuracy"; 1 October issue) following our letter ("Concern at potential spread of bTB by hounds"; 17 September issue).

The original paper¹ does imply the human case of latent TB may have come from hounds, stating: "One kennel worker was also diagnosed with latent TB, potentially due to exposure to infected hounds and/or their contaminated feed, though this remains unproven."

We note one member of staff was diagnosed with a latent infection from an as yet uncharacterised species of *Mycobacterium*. The potential risk of dog-to-human transmission of bTB remains "plausible and real"¹.

The authors suggested statutory bTB testing protocols for cattle were appropriate for hound surveillance. This is the first such large outbreak of bTB reported in dogs, so disease vectors are still unclear and the timescale of pathogenesis is uncertain. It cannot be assumed the use of testing intervals meant to detect bTB in cattle herds will adequately detect all cases of bTB in hound packs. Furthermore, it seems illogical to "decide" the Kimblewick hound pack is free of bTB and stop all further testing, when 13.6 per cent of the animals under study had tested positive by interferon-gamma release assay¹.

The authors cited, as further evidence to support their case, the nine presumptively bTB-infected hounds had no visible lesions (NVL) of bTB at postmortem examination. Their paper¹ stated *Mycobacterium bovis* was cultured from multiple tissues and urine in 11 per cent of hounds with NVL where culture was attempted. NVL should be considered as extremely weak evidence, with a high degree of uncertainty, as to bTB-free status in hounds.

We stand by our previous statements on this issue, and invite the authors to concede they have not proved the Kimblewick hounds – and their cohorts at other hunt kennels – are free of bTB. They cannot do so without further appropriate testing.

The authors' most favoured hypothesis for the introduction of infection to the Kimblewick hounds is by transmission from an infected kennel in the high-risk area (HRA) to a hound destined for Kimblewick: "The likelihood of these hounds becoming infected from fallen stock at these kennels or through other transmission pathways in the HRA was assessed as medium and therefore the most likely."¹

The authors have effectively conceded a medium likelihood exists at least one other hound pack in the HRA was already infected with bTB prior to the Kimblewick outbreak. This begs

the question as to why, if bTB was suspected to have occurred in more than one pack, they have not recommended national surveillance of hound packs. According to *The Sunday Times*, even the Masters of Foxhounds Association is calling for more testing of hound packs², though this requires confirmation.

Perhaps the authors would like to confirm whether they believe banning raw offal as food for hounds is adequate to prevent further bTB outbreaks in hound packs? For clarity – based on the scientific evidence, as previously discussed ("Concern at potential spread of bTB by hounds"; 17 September issue) – we recommend Defra immediately bans the feeding of any raw tissues from livestock to hounds.

For any national analysis of live hounds to be successful, however, something more subtle than a test and slaughter policy will be required. Hunts would surely resist testing or urine culture if the findings could lead to immediate culling of hounds. A more considered, ethical and scientific approach is required.

In England, bTB in cattle is too geographically widespread³ and *M bovis* has infected too many species⁴ for the problem to be solved simply by the further killing of more animals from more species.

O'Halloran et al should concede further testing is required, both at Kimblewick and nationally.

We await with interest comment from Defra's CVO regarding the issues we have raised.

We reiterate our calls for a moratorium on hunting with hounds until such data are presented showing all hunt packs are free of infection with bTB.

Yours faithfully,

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bTB in foxhounds: clarifying points of inaccuracy

Dear editor,
We read with interest the letter about *Mycobacterium bovis* infection in working foxhounds ("Concern at potential spread of bTB by hounds"; 17 September issue), which discussed our paper on the subject. We would, however, like to clarify some points of factual inaccuracy in the coverage of this issue.

Firstly, it has been noted "one member of staff... developed a latent infection with *M bovis* spoligotype '10a' which, the authors suggested, indicates 'dog-to-human transmission... seems highly probable'". As reported in both our previous and upcoming publications^{1,2}, we can confirm *M bovis* was not isolated from samples received from any persons assessed through contact tracing, so dog-to-human transmission of *M bovis* has not been confirmed in this case^{1,2}.

Although one asymptomatic, in-contact person has tested positive for latent TB on interferon-gamma release assay (IGRA) blood screening, it is not possible to speculate the infection is beyond the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* complex – which includes, among other species, both *M tuberculosis* and *M bovis* – nor when in his or her life he or she may have been challenged.

Secondly, the authors proposed we put forward "no evidence" to support the hounds being free from infection when the outbreak was declared over, and that nine hounds later "developed bTB and had to be culled". This is not entirely the case.

As we reported, in the absence of a validated test for tuberculous canine *M bovis* infection, all hounds were tested with a combination of IGRA and serological methods – with the former being performed twice at a 60-day interval, as is standard practice for repeat skin testing of cattle. This means all hounds remaining at the kennel when the outbreak was declared over had been subjected to four tests, across two test points, and were consistently negative.

Our strategy we developed during this outbreak soon^{1,2}. In our view, only by improving our knowledge of the canine manifestation of this disease can we continue to learn more lessons for future disease control.

Yours faithfully,
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Always two sides to every story...

Dear editor,
I am constantly surprised by the bias present in the letters section of *Veterinary Times*, but particularly surprised when well-known members of our profession are listed at the bottom of these letters.

The letter "Concern at potential spread of bTB by hounds" (17 September issue) appears to encourage the euthanasia of hounds and, presumably, culling of cattle to halt the spread of bTB, but uses inflammatory words to describe badger culling.

I would expect vets to be able to present evidence in a scientific manner. Words such as "brutal" and "disgrace" seem unscientific to me; no long list of references will be provided by me to support this statement.

We treat animals brutally in this world in many ways, such as bullfighting, farming bears for bile and clubbing seals to death. I'm not sure controlled shooting can be described this way.

Could I ask, in their next letter, the authors present arguments in favour of badger culling as well as those against? Maybe, in return, Roger Evans can present the reasons in favour of vaccinating badgers in his articles? The more polarised a debate becomes, the less people listen to the views of the other side.

Looking forward to a sense of balance.

Yours faithfully,

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Address supplied.

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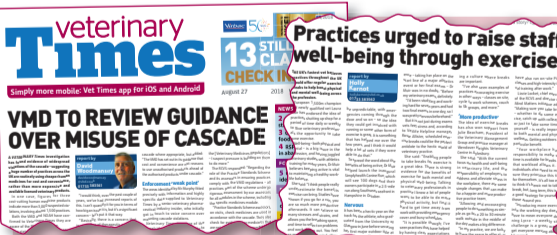
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On our marks and set to escape VMD...

Dear editor,
In view of the front page headline, "VMD to review guidelines over misuse of cascade" (27 August issue), my staff and I welcomed the advice in Holly Kernot's piece in the 24 September issue ("Practices urged to raise staff well-being through exercise").

At least now we will be able to run faster to escape the VMD when it pursues us for our dispensing misdemeanours.

Yours faithfully,

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Graduates invited to join Young Vet Network

Dear editor,
As 2018's new graduates find their way into practice, we encourage them to join their local Young Vet Network (YVN). Membership is open to graduates up to eight years post-graduation, so more seasoned members of the profession are also welcome.

For those working in Northumberland, County Durham, and Tyne and Wear (including Newcastle), the North East of England YVN is putting on a series of CPD and social events in the coming year.

For more information, email kaz.strycharczyk@bsfh.co.uk or join the "North East of England Young Vet Network" Facebook group at <https://bit.ly/2QcAuaj>

Likewise, if you are a practitioner in the region who would consider giving a talk or offering advice to recent graduates, do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours faithfully,

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