

What is brucellosis in dogs?

Brucellosis is a highly contagious bacterial disease that affects all dogs regardless of age or breed.

Unfortunately it is possible for some infected dogs not to show any signs but still be carriers who can spread the disease to other animals including humans.

What causes brucellosis in dogs?

Brucellosis in dogs is caused by the bacteria *Brucella canis*.

How is brucellosis spread in dogs?

Canine brucellosis is spread through breeding and from contact with infected fluids.

The most common way a dog can pick up the infection is by licking urine or other bodily fluids, sniffing infected fluids, or mating with an infected dog.

Other less common ways of spreading the disease are saliva, faeces, milk and blood.

Can humans catch brucellosis from dogs?

Canine brucellosis can spread to humans, especially veterinary teams when helping an infected dog give birth. In rare cases, the disease can be passed on from a family pet to human family members through saliva, urine and other bodily fluids.

Symptoms of human brucellosis include:

- Fever
- Headaches
- Lower back pain
- Dizziness
- Joint and muscle pain
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite

Case study

Grandmother Wendy Hayes lost all five of her dogs to brucellosis after fostering a pregnant dog from Belarus.

She also caught the disease herself — which is very rare — soon after Moosha miscarried, losing all 10 of her puppies.

Three of Wendy's four dog's later tested positive for brucellosis.

All five dogs were put to sleep to help stop the spread of the disease, leaving Wendy heartbroken.

She's now calling on the government to ban all imports of dogs until the risks from brucellosis are reduced.

Canine brucellosis treatment

Brucellosis in dogs is very difficult to treat. Antibiotics can control the infection, but no cure or treatment is 100% effective. Sadly, the only certain way to remove the risk of spreading disease caused by *Brucella canis*, and to prevent suffering, is to put infected dogs to sleep.

Canine brucellosis prevention

If your dog is at risk, ensure they are tested for brucellosis.

Brucellosis vaccine for dogs

No vaccine for brucellosis is currently available.

How common is brucellosis in dogs?

Brucellosis is rare in the UK and up to early 2021, around 40 cases in dogs had been reported. The vast majority of dogs testing positive are believed to have acquired the infection outside of the UK, but we do not know this for certain. The first dog-to-human case was reported in March 2022, when Wendy Hayes contracted *B. canis* and was hospitalised for two weeks.

How do vets test for brucellosis in dogs?

There are, unfortunately, no tests for brucellosis in dogs that are 100% accurate.

In most cases, experts recommend serological testing. These look for antibodies — proteins that can fight off infections — in blood. With brucellosis, these antibodies are usually produced within two weeks of infection but can take up to three months, and sometimes infected puppies may not produce them at all.

Testing imported dogs at the time of import and after 3-4 months is currently the best way to detect infected animals and prevent disease spread.

Due to the lack of reliable testing methods, your vet will also ask about your dog's symptoms, their recent movements and whether they've come into contact with other dogs in recent weeks and months.

How much does brucellosis testing cost?

There's no set price in the UK for brucellosis testing, although you can expect to pay upwards of £125 for the first test.

I'm worried my dog has brucellosis, what should I do?

Speak to your vet, who can arrange for testing to be carried out. If your dog tests positive for *Brucella canis*, by law the case must be reported to the Animal and Plant Health Agency. You should also report the infection to your local health protection team.

In which countries is brucellosis found?

Brucella canis is considered endemic in southern parts of the USA, Mexico, Central America, and South America. Numerous cases have been reported in China, India and Japan, and it's also found in Canada. In Europe, countries with large stray dog populations are believed to have the highest prevalence of the disease. Concerns have been raised about dogs in Romania, Belarus, Russia, Moldova and North Macedonia, among other countries.

Importing puppies to the UK

While the UK has one of the most rigorous pet-checking regimes in the world — and all imported dogs must meet certain health requirements, have the correct documentation and be old enough to travel — it's currently not compulsory to test for brucellosis.

Unfortunately, thousands of puppies and dogs are imported into the UK illegally every year. Many are bred in appalling conditions and smuggled via long, arduous routes. It is important that dogs from abroad are tested for brucellosis and other diseases. If you have any concerns about this prior to buying, adopting or rescuing an imported dog, you should make an appointment to discuss this with your vet & possibly consider whether to go ahead.