

Reference Number : DAERA/26-617



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

Veterinary Service Animal Health Group
Information Communication Branch

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Via Email:

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14 September 2026

Dear [REDACTED]

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Thank you for your email received by the Department on 14 August 2026 which you sought the information in bold below.

I can advise that the Department has completed its search and can confirm that it holds some the information you requested as detailed below.

Between January 2025 to August 2026:

- 1. How many animals were tested for TB in Northern Ireland? Please also provide this breakdown by type of animal.**

There are currently two official tests approved for use in EU Approved TB Eradication Programmes and therefore suitable for use in the Northern Ireland Eradication Programme to detect Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) in live cattle.

Routine testing is carried out using the Comparative Intradermal Tuberculin Test (CITT) commonly referred to as the 'skin test'. In certain circumstances a supplementary test, the Interferon Gamma (IFN-g) blood test is also used in addition to the skin test to improve detection of early infection in herds infected with bTB, and occasionally for investigation purposes.

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In 2025, 1,768,644 cattle were tested for bTB using the skin test. The number of animal tests carried out was 3,470,055 as many animals were tested more than once. There were also 19,859 IFN-g blood tests carried out for the purpose of increasing the early detection of diseased animals in infected herds, and 107 for investigation purposes.

From January- July 2026 1,374,220 cattle were skin tested, and the number of animal tests carried out was 2,026,259. During this period 14,088 IFN-g tests were done for the early detection of disease, and 39 for investigation purposes.

DAERA do not have a testing or control programme in place for non-bovine animals. Most tests of non-bovines are carried out privately by Private Veterinary Practitioners. Permission from DAERA is required before arranging private testing and as bTB is a notifiable disease, it is mandatory to report positive animals.

In 2025, 15 llamas and 51 alpacas were tested.

In 2026 to the end of July, 6 llamas, 13 pigs and 8 deer were tested as part of a multi-species outbreak.

Since mid-July 2026, badgers are being captured and tested as part of a research project in a Regionalisation Area set up with the aim of trialling additional measures for the control of bTB. The data for this work will be published later.

DAERA also collect badger carcasses reported dead due to traffic accidents (RTA badgers). These carcasses are submitted to the laboratory for postmortem. In 2025, there were 330 RTA badger carcasses tested for bTB, and of these 75 were confirmed positive for bTB. From January to May 2026 (provisional data) 188 RTA badger carcasses have been submitted, and available results to date have confirmed bTB in 14 of these but this data is incomplete as testing has not been completed on all these badgers.

2. How many of these animals tested positive for TB and were moved to slaughter? Please also provide this breakdown by type of animal.

All cattle that test positive to the CITT and IFN-g testing are subject to compulsory removal. Animals that are positive to both IFN-g and skin testing are included in the skin test data. Occasionally animals may die on farm before removal or are euthanised on farm if they are not fit to travel to slaughter for welfare reasons and therefore no slaughter data will be available for these. Provisional figures indicate that there are 411 of these animals in the time scale for which you have requested information.

In 2025 there were 18,892 skin test positive animals.

From January to July 2026 there were 10,989 skin test positive animals.

In 2025 1379 IFN-g positive but skin test negative animals were detected and removed based on IFN-g results alone.

From January-July 26, there were 959 IFN-g positive/skin negative animals disclosed.

For non- bovines, in 2025 there was one llama positive to testing for bTB.

In 2026 to date there were 4 positive llamas and 3 positive pigs.

These animals were tested as part of a multi-species outbreak. Pigs, deer and surviving llamas were euthanised on farm, and no postmortems were carried out.

3. Of the animals moved to slaughter, how many were subsequently revealed to be TB negative after slaughter.

It is not clear from the request if the information requested relates to the number of animals truly infected or not infected following a positive response to a test, or to the number of animals that displayed or failed to display bTB like lesions at the time of slaughter following a positive response to a test. The answer to both possible requests is laid out below.

1. The number of animals truly infected/not infected with bTB following a positive response to an official test:

For the purpose of predicting test positive animals as being truly infected with bTB, reference must be made to the respective specificity of the CITT skin test and the IFN-g blood test.

Further information on this can be found on the following link: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/tb-skin-test>

The extract below explains further:

Specificity is the ability of a test to correctly identify an animal that is free from infection as negative, i.e., the higher the specificity, the lower the probability of classifying an uninfected animal as infected (a false positive result).

The skin test has an excellent test specificity of 99.98%. This means that it is very rare that a non-infected animal will be wrongly classified as diseased.

The IFN-g test has a higher sensitivity (it will miss fewer TB-infected animals) but lower specificity (it may wrongly classify more non-infected animals as diseased) compared to the skin test. Due to the lower specificity, this test is currently only used in selected TB breakdown herds in NI as it has a lower specificity compared to the skin test.

The specificity of the skin test means that the probability of a false positive test is approximately 1 in 5000 tested cattle. The IFN-g test with a lower specificity (96.5%) will have a higher false positive rate of 3-4 animals per 100 tested.

2. The number of animals that displayed visible TB like lesions at time of slaughter following a positive response to an official test:

Should your question relate to the disclosure or not of 'visible bTB lesions' at time of slaughter, these are not considered a standard of disease confirmation following a positive test, but rather an indicator of disease progression as the progression to 'visible bTB lesions' may take months or years to develop. Some animals that do not have visible lesions may later be confirmed by laboratory testing on carcass samples submitted for histopathological examination but very few non-visibly lesioned (NVL) animals have samples submitted for further investigation.

More information on TB reactor postmortem findings at slaughter can be found on the DAERA TB Portal: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/diagnosing-bovine-tb#toc-12>

and on the UK TB Hub <https://tbhub.co.uk/tb-testing-cattle/post-mortem-inspection/why-nvl-doesnt-mean-no-infection-with-m-bovis/>

In 2025 10093 skin test positive animals were confirmed with bTB by postmortem or laboratory test results where samples are submitted to the laboratory.

As final confirmation data for slaughtered cattle lags due to the time taken to carry out laboratory testing, confirmation data for 2026 is currently only available up to the end of March 2026 and within that time, 2,902 of these animals have been confirmed by postmortem or laboratory testing.

Samples from IFN-g positive skin negative animals are not submitted for laboratory testing. In 2025, 393 of these animals had obvious bTB-like lesions at slaughter.

Slaughter data for IFN-g positive and skin negative animals disclosed from January 2026-July 2026 is not complete although so far 218 have had bTB like lesions at slaughter.

TB statistics for cattle are available at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/tuberculosis-statistics-northern-ireland-2007-2026>

If you require any clarification, believe that any part of your request has been overlooked, misunderstood or misinterpreted, please contact me in the first instance to see if it is a matter that can be resolved.

If you are unhappy with the way your request for information has been handled or the decision to release/withhold information, you have the right to request a formal review by the Department. If you wish to do so, please contact The Review Section either by e-mailing daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk or by post at The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Data Protection & Information Management Branch, Floor 2, Jubilee House, 111 Ballykelly Road, Ballykelly, Limavady BT49 9HP, within two months from the date of this letter.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE, SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review of the Department's decision.

Yours sincerely,



Veterinary Service Animal Health Group

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