Bovine TB - Badger Vaccination FAQs

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Why Vaccinate badgers?
The aim of badger vaccination is to reduce transmission of TB between badgers and between badgers and cattle, by reducing the severity of disease and shedding of bacteria from infected individual badgers and reducing the prevalence of disease in badger populations

Is badger vaccination a priority for Government?
Developing effective badger TB vaccines is a high priority for Defra. They have invested over £16 million in badger TB vaccine R&D since 1994/95, of which £5.7 million was on oral badger vaccine work and over the next 5 years have budgeted to spend a further £7.5 million

Who has carried out research in to badger bTB vaccines?
Research has been carried out by Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) and the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera) with their national and international collaborators.

What progress has been made on badger vaccines?
AHVLA has successfully licensed the injectable badger TB vaccine and they are in the process of developing an oral badger vaccine. An oral badger vaccine is still at the research stage and not yet licensable. Progress on developing an effective oral badger vaccine relies on scientific breakthroughs in this difficult field and is therefore uncertain in outcome and timing. A licensed oral badger vaccine will not be available for at least several years

What is the injectable badger bTB vaccine?
It is based on the human BCG vaccine. BCG has an excellent safety record, is relatively low cost, commercially available and been shown to work in many different species, including badgers. The injectable vaccine is called BadgerBCG.

How often would badger vaccination be necessary?
Because badgers do not have individual veterinary records, annual revaccination of each social group would be necessary. Sustained vaccination campaigns would be required to reduce prevalence of disease in badger populations.

Why is Annual vaccination required?
Each year there is an approximate 30% rate of population turnover including new cubs and badger movement. Annual revaccination and sustained vaccination campaigns would be required to reduce prevalence of disease in badger population

How soon would the benefits of badger vaccination show up?
It will take many years of repeated vaccination before the disease declines in badgers - disease control benefits would be expected to accrue incrementally during a sustained vaccination campaign as numbers of successfully immunised badgers increase and previously infected animals died and herd immunity builds up in the population (whereby there may be a reduction of infection or disease in the unimmunised segment as a result of immunising a high enough proportion of the population)

Are the main benefits of vaccination to individual badgers or the local population?
The main benefit anticipated is through the longer term build up of herd immunity in local badger populations.

How quickly will the benefits of vaccinations be revealed?
It will take many years of repeated vaccination before the disease declines in badgers - disease control benefits would be expected to accrue incrementally during a sustained vaccination campaign as numbers of successfully immunised badgers increase and previously infected animals died off.

Is it true that there are no benefits before five years of a vaccination programme?
No, research has shown that vaccination of individual captive badgers reduced the progression, severity and excretion of bTB. Protection and benefits at the population level takes time to achieve with longer vaccinating programmes more beneficial than shorter ones.

Is the Badger vaccine a cure for bTB?
There is no evidence that BadgerBCG has any therapeutic effect on badgers that are infected with TB before they are vaccinated. The badger vaccine is not a cure for TB.