THE INTERNATIONAL MEAT TRADE ASSOCIATION

What Are Veterinary Checks?

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KEY POINTS

- Third country meat being imported into the EU faces veterinary checks at port/ airport/ border.
- The checks range from verifying paperwork to sending samples of product to a laboratory for testing.
- Testing of salmonella and listeria, for instance, can take 1-3 working days to get the sample to a lab by courier and 3-4 working days for the lab to establish presence of the bacteria, and more days to establish the specific type. Depending on day of the week and lab capacity it could take longer.
- Veterinary checks are paid for by the importer. The time checks take depends on a number of factors including which tests are being done and capacity at the BCP.
- Not every port has a BCP, including Dover. There are no BCPs on the Northern Ireland-Ireland border. Calais has constructed a BCP.

What Are Veterinary Checks?

EU regulations 2019/2129 and 2019/2130 establish the rates of veterinary checks for food products of animal origin*, including meat, entering the EU. There are three elements to veterinary checks.

Documentary Check

Involves verifying the veterinary certificates and documents accompanying the consignment. Vets ensure the paper work has been completed correctly and is in compliance with EU legislation.

Identity Check

Here the vet ascertains that the products correspond to the information in the accompanying documentation. Usually this means the seal on the actual container is looked at to ensure it matches the information in the corresponding paperwork. This usually involves the container being taken from its stack at port and brought to the Border Control Post or designated seal check area for a vet to inspect the seal.

Physical Check

Physical checks always involve a container being opened. There are various checks which a vet can carry out which include examining the packaging, checking temperatures, sending samples for analysis at a laboratory and vets may smell or taste a product (organoleptic testing).

Frequency of Checks

EU regulations 2019/2129 and 2019/2130 set down the frequencies:

NON-EU IMPORT CHECKS	Product	Official that undertakes inspection	Frequency of Checks		
			Documentary Checks	ID Checks	Physical Checks
	Beef, lamb, pork	Official Veterinarian	100%	100%	15%
	Poultrymeat	Official Veterinarian	100%	100%	30%

*Other rates apply for minced meat, meat preparations and meat products and can be found in Regulation 2019/2129

Where Do Veterinary Checks Take Place?

The checks are carried out at a Border Control Post (BCP) by the competent authority under the responsibility of an official veterinarian. These checks are carried out at the point where the product reaches the EU but has not entered into free circulation. In the EU BCPs exist at designated ports, borders and airports.

BCPs are specialised facilities which have the space and the equipment which vets require to carry out the checks in hygienic conditions. Containers are brought up to the BCP where they can be opened into a temperature controlled environment.

To plan and construct a new BCP usually takes several years and involves many steps including identifying an appropriate location within a port/ on a border, securing funding, obtaining planning permission, construction and sourcing veterinarians with the appropriate qualifications.

If samples are sent to a laboratory for microbiological or residue testing this may prolong the amount of time before the product can leave the port which can add costs.

The Cost of Veterinary Checks

Usually the cost associated with veterinary checks is borne by the importer. Either they are billed directly by the authority if they do the paperwork themselves, or indirectly by their freight forwarders who are billed by Port Health, which is usually run by a local authority. The cost of checks vary according to product, type of checks and whether samples were taken and sent to a laboratory etc.

Official Controls Regulation

The new Official Controls Regulation came in to force on 14th December 2019.



A Border Control Post at the Port of Southampton (Source: IMTA)

IMTA represents importers, exporters and wholesalers of meat. We believe two-way trade is essential to deliver carcass balance, food security and consumer choice. We are a member of the European Livestock and Meat Trades Union (UECBV).

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* Note: Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) checks also apply to other food products of animal origin, such as dairy and honey, to by-products not intended for human consumption and to animal feed and plant products. Phytosanitary checks apply to plants.