

National Bee Unit

FAQ 25



The Food and Environment
Research Agency

OTC Treatments of colonies with EFB

Please read and retain for future reference

This sheet deals with actions relating to colonies treated with oxytetracycline (OTC) following diagnosis of European Foul Brood (EFB) by an appointed bee inspector.

The reason for change.

In 1967 OTC treatment for EFB infected colonies was introduced into the U.K. The application method was in solution with sugar syrup. A standstill period was placed on the treated apiary to allow for anti-biotic residues in honey to break down, before extraction and either personal consumption or sale. The standstill was lifted after a clear foul brood inspection by the appointed bee inspector at least eight weeks after treatment. Since that time analytical methods used to detect residues in food have greatly improved and recent studies by the Central Science Laboratory's National Bee Unit (NBU) have established that OTC residues remain at significant levels in honey substantially beyond an eight-week period.

In light of these studies, and so as to maintain the integrity of OTC in both animal and human medicine DEFRA has agreed with the NBU that procedural changes must be made relating to OTC treated colonies.

Alternatives to OTC treatment.

The NBU is currently running a trial relating to 'shook swarm' treatment techniques, which do not use OTC or other anti-biotic. Destruction of infected colonies may also be an option. Your Bee Inspector can advise you on the suitability of these alternatives.

What happens now?

On suspecting EFB in an apiary the ABI places a standstill on the apiary. This means that you cannot remove any bees, equipment or crop away from the apiary without a movement licence. It will remain in force until such time as it is lifted by a Bee Inspector. Standstill orders usually remain in force for a minimum of six weeks. P.T.O.

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If you choose OTC treatment;

The bee inspector will apply the OTC to the colony, which as it is issued on veterinary prescription will not be carried out at the time of discovery. The beekeeper is required to note the date and other details of the treatment in their bee medicine register. The Bee Inspector will return to re-examine the bees after a minimum of six weeks or the commencement of the following season. If there is no suspicion of an EFB infection the standstill will be lifted. If EFB is confirmed again the standstill remains in force.

Can I remove the honey crop?

A licence may be made available to harvest honey on colonies in infected apiaries prior to OTC treatment. Conditions will apply to which the beekeeper must adhere. These include returning supers and combs to the colony from which they came.

Will this apply to uninfected colonies?

Yes.

What happens after treatment?

Supers can be removed and harvested subject to a movement licence being issued. Honey extracted from colonies that have been treated with OTC must be packaged, labelled and stored for a period of least six calendar months from the date of treatment. ***This is the beekeepers responsibility.*** The extraction equipment must be thoroughly cleansed after use extracting honey from treated colonies. Supers and combs must be returned to the hive from which they were taken.

What happens if the standstill order is lifted?

Supers can be removed and extracted without the need for a licence. However honey extracted from colonies that have been treated with OTC must be packaged, labelled and stored for a period of least six calendar months from the date of treatment. ***This is the beekeepers responsibility.*** The extraction equipment must be thoroughly cleaned after use extracting honey from treated colonies. Supers and combs should be returned to the hive from which they were taken.

It is the beekeepers responsibility to ensure that no honey from OTC treated colonies enters the food chain for a period of at least six calendar months.

Record of treatment. *This must also be recorded in your bee medicament register.*

Date of treatment	Apiary name	Identification numbers of OTC treated colonies

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