

Four years of testing without confirmed infection- what now?

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Currently the Irish Johne's Control Programme (IJCP) is in Phase two, this having commenced on the 1st of January 2019. The previous version of the IJCP known as Phase one had all its registered herdowners automatically carried forward into the new Phase two programme. Phase two of the IJCP is a package agreed by the Implementation Group representing all stakeholders, with funding shared between the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, the milk processors (for dairy herds) and herdowners. All herds entering Phase two of the IJCP in 2019 or in subsequent years were initially designated as being in 'Year One' of the programme and commenced implementation of the following required components of the programme:

- A Veterinary Risk Assessment and Management Plan (VRAMP) conducted by their nominated Approved Veterinary Practitioner (AVP).
- An annual whole herd test (WHT): one blood or one milk sample per eligible animal tested by ELISA.
- Ancillary testing of faecal samples from all animals following ELISA test-positive or inconclusive results in herds where the presence of MAP, the causative bacteria, has not already been confirmed (previous faecal positive result).
- A veterinary assessment known as a Targeted Advisory Service on Animal Health (TASAH) following positive ancillary test results.

In general, but not always, herds which completed their WHT and found animals with positive or inconclusive ELISA test results are subjected to ancillary PCR testing on faecal samples. Exceptions were herds where infection had already previously been confirmed by PCR or culture, and animals which were ELISA tested within 90 days after a TB test or within 7 days of calving (milk samples only).

After the initial whole herd test herds progress to either a test-negative or test-positive pathway for the next year of the programme, again completing a VRAMP and WHT. To enter the test-negative pathway herds either return no ELISA positive/inconclusive animals, or any such animals must have a negative faecal PCR test result (negative WHTs; Figure 1). Herds which return a faecal PCR positive result or fail to complete ancillary testing are assigned to a test-positive pathway.

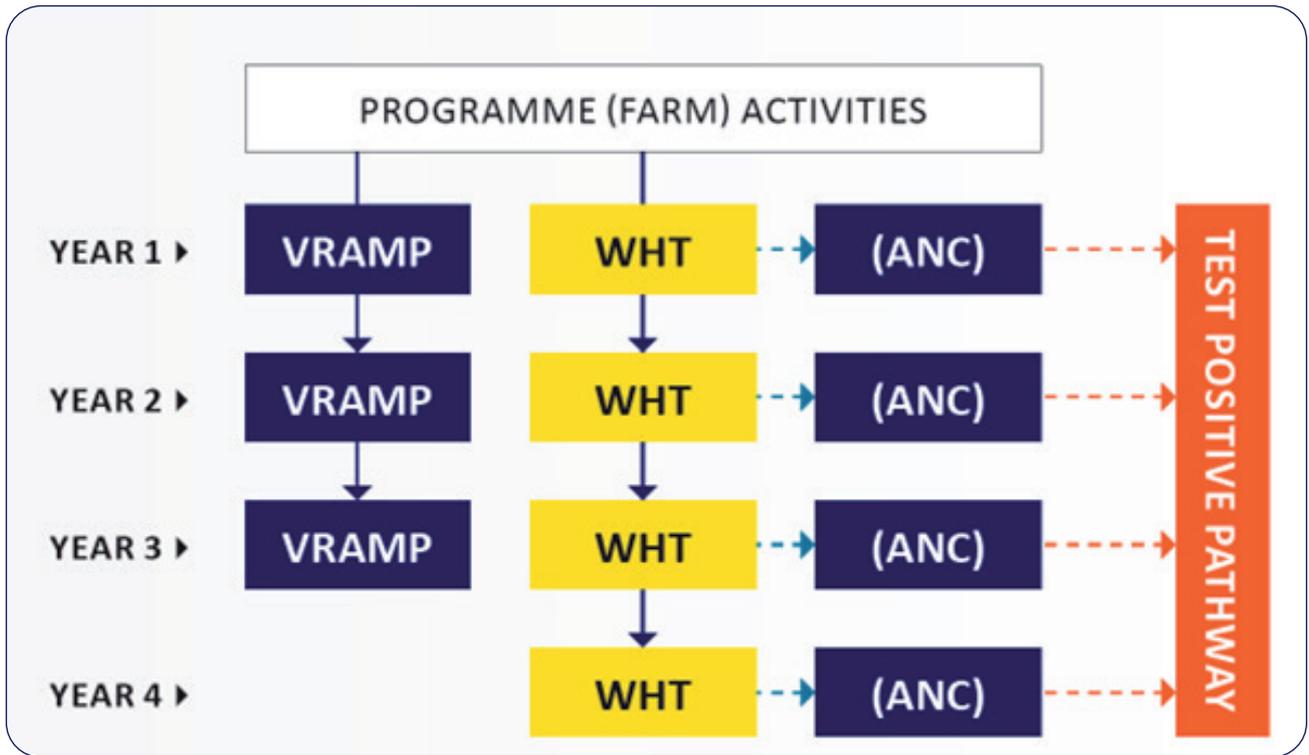


Figure 1. Programme activities required for each of the first four years of the tes-negative pathway.

Herds which maintained their position in a negative pathway from 2019 through to the start of 2022 have completed three consecutive years of negative whole herd tests and in 2022 are required to complete a WHT but not a VRAMP. While these herdowners may still wish to conduct a VRAMP with their approved veterinary practitioner, this is not funded by the programme and will be at their own expense.

Currently within the 2022 Irish Johne's Control Programme there are 362 herds registered in year four as text-negative pathway herds. These have all completed at least three negative whole herd tests and three VRAMPs since the start of Phase two of the programme in 2019. This group of herds are currently in the process of completing their year four whole herd test and should this return a negative result they will enter year five of the programme in 2023, still within a negative pathway. All herds registered in year four in the text-negative pathway will receive a letter from Animal Health Ireland providing advice to them, but remember if you are in doubt about whether a VRAMP is required for your herd, consult your Johne's disease dashboard on ICBF (Figure 2).

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ELISA re-testing recommended?	No
Date of last VRAMP	30-NOV-21
VRAMP for 2022	Not Required
Last TB test date	16-JUN-2022
Next scheduled TB test date	16-JUN-2023
BTM positive herd?	No



Figure 2: Section of the Johne's disease dashboard showing that this herd does not currently require a VRAMP to meet the 2022 programme requirements.

Completed year four of Whole Herd Testing and still in the test- negative pathway - what now?

Completing year four requirements for the Irish Johne's Control Programme and still maintaining a negative pathway for your herd is an important milestone. Repeated annual negative results from a whole herd test will tend to provide increasing assurance that your herd is either free of Johne's disease or has only a low proportion of infected animals. The number of successive negative whole herd tests carried out on eligible animals is one important contributor to herd assurance, the others being the actual results contained within the whole herd tests (discuss with your AVP) and the number of animals introduced and the status of the herds from which these came. Currently herds entering year five of the programme with four years on the test-negative pathway will not require a whole herd test or VRAMP in 2023. Details of requirements in subsequent years are currently being decided and will be communicated separately.

Having invested so much effort in reaching year four of the IJCP without infection being confirmed, bio-exclusion is now an increasingly important consideration for your herd. It is recommended that herdowners ask any potential supplier of breeding cattle about their Johne's disease herd history, specifically about their testing and their purchase history over the past 5 years (increasing numbers of animals and of source herds carrying an increased risk of infection being introduced) to assess this biosecurity risk. It is also important, even at this stage to not reduce adherence to the good practices learned through previous VRAMPs, as it is still possible that undetected infection is present. Plus, the good hygiene of bio-containment should improve calf health and ultimately productivity, irrespective of Johne's disease.