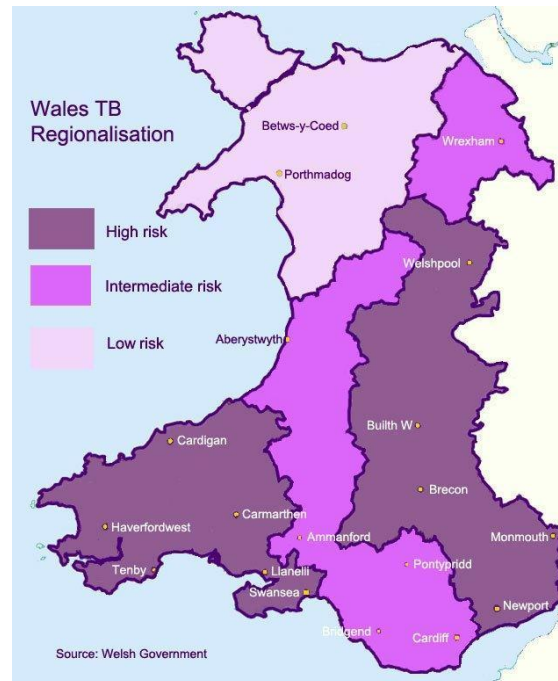


Bovine TB in Wales 2026.

What does a comparison of scientific data with England* show?

24 August 2026



An independent summary report: **1800 words - 7 minutes reading time**

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*To-March 2026

Introduction

Whether badgers play a significant role in bovine TB (bTB) in cattle and whether badger interventions can make any difference to bTB levels in cattle herds, are both uncertain. One of the largest evidence bases in Europe comes from long-term comparison between England, with a policy that has intensively culled badgers, and Wales, which has not. This report by independent researchers and scientists examines this vital point of reference, as a rare insight into what the data can tell us.

In May 2024, Huw Irranca-Davies, the Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for *Climate Change and Rural Affairs*, made a Statement in the Senedd on bovine TB herd incidence in Wales: *The future of farming in Wales* (Irranca-Davies 2024)).

“But just to be clear, from 2012, which is the year before badger control policy in England, to 2023, on the latest published data, the herd incidence in England decreased from 9.8 to 7.3; it was a 26 per cent decrease. In Wales, over the same period, herd incidence decreased from 10 to 6.8. It's a 31.3 per cent decrease. I simply put that on record—those are Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs figures, by the way—to say that we are doing things differently in Wales, in line with our programme for government, but we're also succeeding in many ways.”

Welsh Government had concluded that Wales had as much success in dealing with bovine TB as England, a country where badgers had been heavily culled for a decade. England has expended, with industry, huge financial and practical resources on badger culling interventions. BTB Statistics (now to March 2026) are visible on the online dashboard (2) https://tbstatistics.github.io/interactive_dashboard/ and the source for this report.

Using the dashboard to view trends needs careful consideration because there are changing factors that make up and influence the figures, that are not immediately obvious. The all country figures accumulate data from different risk areas, which are under different conditions, surveillance and control measures. This makes simple understanding and learning hard without cogent interpretation.

The 2017 Bovine TB Eradication Programme for Wales established five risk areas; each divided into further spatial units (WG 2017). Progress in the worst affected areas of each country; the Welsh *High Risk Areas* and the English *High Risk Area* (HRA) can be usefully compared, as they are geographically relatively proximate and of generally similar character. However, there has been a significant temporary increase of bTB in Wales High TB Area West, together with, from 2017 in north Wales, a gradual spread from England; Staffordshire (HRA England) and Cheshire and from elsewhere in Wales during 2020/21; Denbigh and Conwy area. (Seery et al. 2024).

What does the government dashboard tracking results and documentation tell us?

CATTLE TESTS (High Risk Areas)

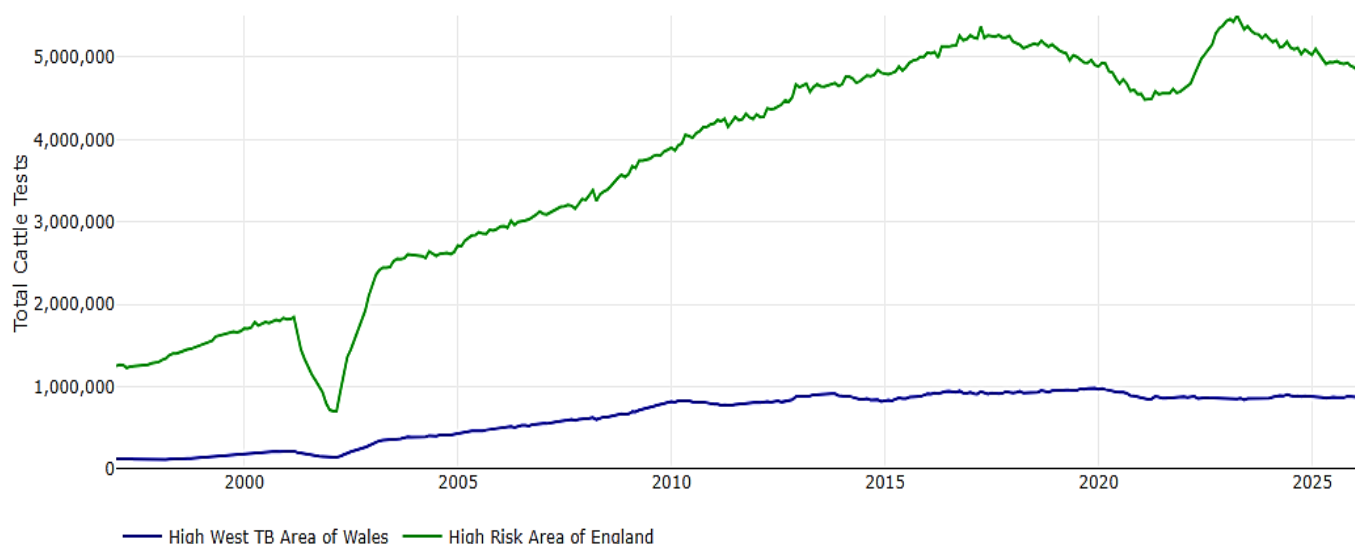


Figure 1. Annual bovine TB cattle tests done in England's High Risk and the Welsh High West TB Area over the last thirty years – to March 2026.

The ratio of bTB tests in the higher bTB risk areas of England and Wales has changed since 2010. In the English HRA it has grown by around 20%, while in the worst bTB areas in Wales: High West TB Area (HWTBA), testing remained constant (Fig.1). In England, in 2022, routine tuberculin testing (SICCT) changed from annual to six-monthly across its High Risk Area (HRA), and tracking shows a jump in testing.

The Welsh Government proposed 6-monthly testing during consultation for a *Refreshed TB Eradication Programme* (2016-2017). This was rejected due to industry objections to financial and physical burden to cattle farmers. Since 2018, Wales has not introduced general additional mandatory measures to improve bTB detection. Importantly, the size of the *Intensive Action Area* (IAA) in Pembrokeshire (288 sq.km) is under 10% of the HWTBA in Wales, and the only area in Wales undertaking six-monthly testing. Elsewhere in Wales, six-monthly bTB testing is only applied when TB is established in a 'cluster' as in the more recent infections caused by cattle movement in the Low TB and Intermediate North Areas, when enhanced measures and increased sensitivity of testing are also applied.

HERD INCIDENCE (National comparison)

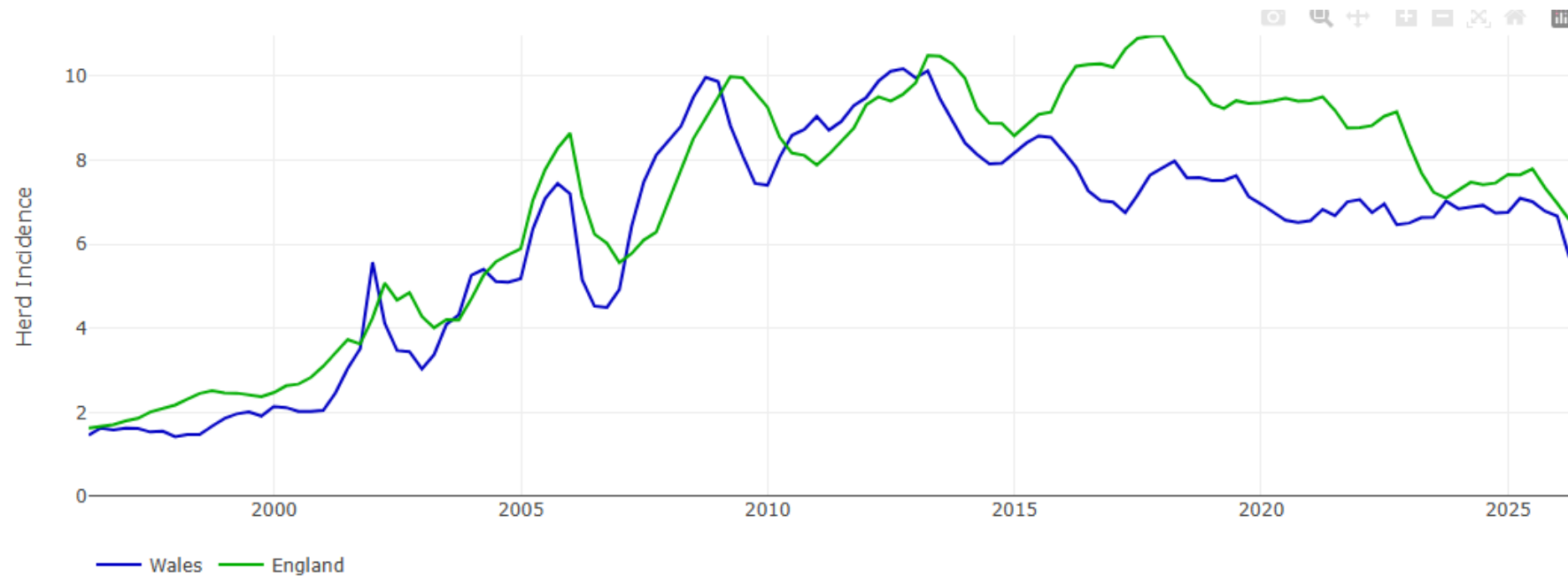


Figure 2. Total herd incidence comparison between all England and Wales over the last thirty years – to March 2026.

With a national comparison, in 2005 neither England nor Wales had a detailed strategy to deal with bovine TB, following its rapid resurgence in the aftermath of the *Foot and Mouth Disease* epidemic. Both held herd incidence at around 6% (Fig.2) . Use of SICCT, including pre-movement testing, were the only surveillance and preventative measure used. England and Wales followed a similar disease trajectory until 2015. Wales had adopted a policy of cattle control measures and increased sensitivity of testing from 2009 onwards, while England adopted a policy of basic testing and badger intervention. In 2026 the incidence rate is around 6%: 5.7 for Wales and 6.6 for England. (BTB dashboard to-March 2026). Improvement in Wales was as good as or better than in England.

HERD PREVALENCE (High Risk Areas)

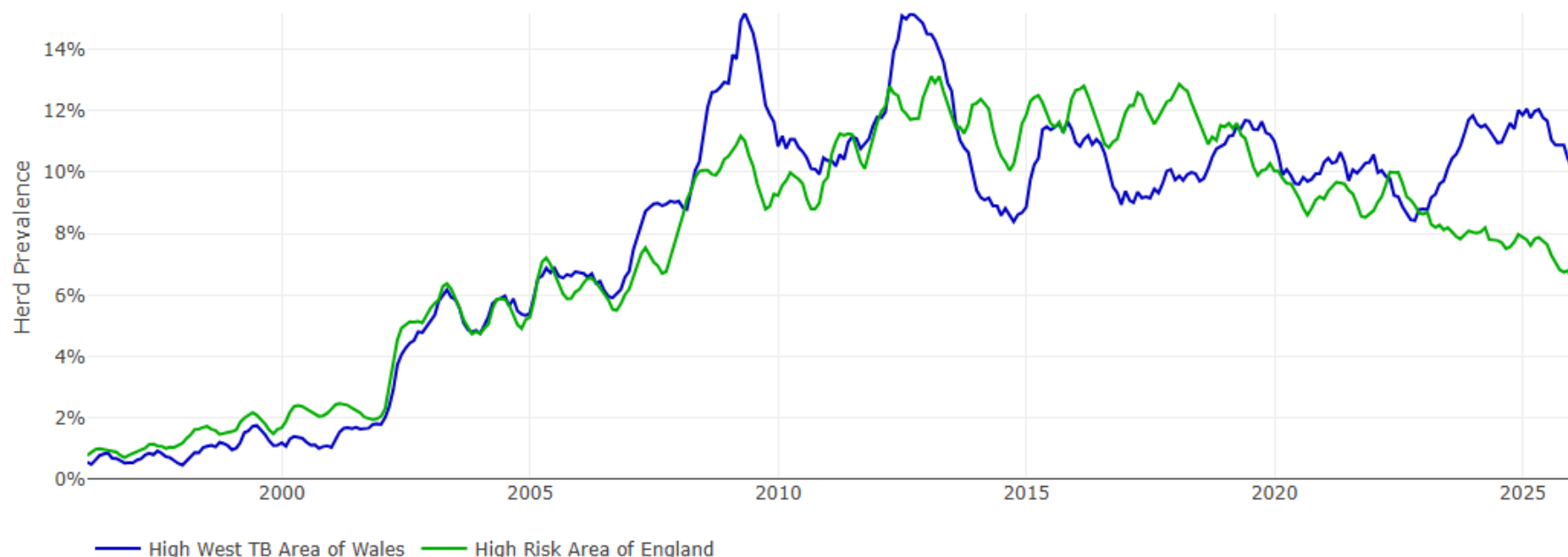


Figure 3. Annual bovine TB herd prevalence (OTF-S + OTF-W) as a percentage of all herds in the Welsh HWTBA and the English HRA over the last thirty years – to March 2026.

Herd prevalence data better reflects disease rate, recording 'total incidents' (OTFS+OTFW). Scientific evidence had shown Suspended (OTF-S) reactors are all, or nearly all infected (Nunez Garcia 2018), something that in England was doubted, at that time. Returning to High Risk Area comparisons, in the Fig. 3. example, in High West TB Wales, (one of the two equivalents to the English HRA) progress falls behind English HRA prevalence levels from around 2023, as it has occasionally in the past. The recent spike in prevalence from 2023 in Wales however appears under control with steep decline in 2026.

High TB Area West of Wales continues to be an important factor in the overall bovine TB prevalence in Wales. Pembrokeshire has the highest number of persistent and recurrent herds which need addressing. The spike and then fall in herd prevalence in Wales since around 2023 illustrates the magnitude of challenge in eradicating infection from large and persistent herds in endemic areas. It can take several years to eradicate bovine TB, even when additional increased sensitivity tests such as gamma interferon, Enferplex and IDEXX are used, with removal of a higher proportion infected/high risk animals.

Does the data tell us anything about badger interventions?

In 2008, Wales introduced *Health Check Wales*, with a reduction of late/overdue testing. Annual testing became the norm from 2010 (by 2013 in the English HRA/Edge Area) and enhanced measures and testing was put in place before England (Bayley 2014). IDEXX bTB antibody testing was approved and employed in Wales from 2020. Iddex test reactors were removed with compensation for slaughter. In England from 2013 - 2017 additional cattle controls were slowly introduced into the HRA/Edge (Langton & Torgerson 2024), with intensive badger culling expanding from 2016, referred to as the 'Badger Control Policy' (BCP).

From 2017 the BCP introduced more intensive interferon gamma (IFG) testing for new herd incidents and persistent breakdowns and not just as reported (Birch 2024); during the 3rd and 4th year culls. DEFRA data shows gamma testing also took place in many areas before and during the first and second cull years (Langton, Griffiths and Griffiths 2024). The disease left undetected by the tuberculin test (SICCT) exceeded 50,000 reactors detected by gamma, over the 2017-2024 period. However, even gamma testing will not find all undetected infections. One of the big questions is how much disease is missing in these statistics? Disease burden detected using SICCT is now well known by veterinarian epidemiologists to greatly underestimate true burden, as has been more recently shown by investigative research in the British Isles using enhanced tests (Hayden 2025, Dane 2026). While extensive badger culling was used in England, old evidence from the largest of culling 'trials' (once considered authoritative) is now considered weak (Godfray et al. 2025) yet is deeply embedded in DEFRA/APHA publications and policy. Data and scientific evidence (Langton et al. 2022, Birch et al. 2024, Langton and Torgerson 2024), show that change in bTB levels in England (to 2023 as the culling policy wound down) is consistent with a response to cattle testing and movement control. This is also reflected in the substantive comparison data for England and Wales.

Conclusions

A downturn of progress in bovine TB control Wales from 2021, becoming more visible after 2023, can be attributed to changes in two areas. These are, from 2020; the Intermediate North area, and to a greater extent from 2022 the High TB West Area. As HTBWA holds 27% of the total herds in Wales and almost 50% of Welsh dairy herds, failure in these areas (see also Annex 1., for detail) will hugely influence the national picture.

Further progress is required for Wales to achieve bovine TB eradication. There is an immediate need for regionally adapted surveillance and cattle control measures to accelerate the reduction in disease. A more aggressive policy approach is required, including implementation of six-monthly testing initially across the High TB Areas, followed by the intermediate TB areas. Similarly, parallel gamma testing for all new herd incidents in High TB Areas is needed.

Senior statisticians now agree that previous badger culling experiments that were the basis of badger culling in England held ‘inconclusive’ statistical analysis, and that modelling chosen to conclude that badger culling was effective, was ‘unnatural’ and a ‘naïve at best’ (Godfray et al. 2025, Brewer 2025). While genomic evidence shows cattle and badgers sometimes sharing the same strains, the rate and direction of infection remain unknown and vulnerable to highly wide-ranging and selective estimations only (Langton 2026). There is simply no hard evidence of significant badger to cattle transmission on which to justify public or industry expenditure on badger interventions.

With these simple and clear interpretations, it can be seen that Huw Irranca-Davies and the Welsh Government Veterinary Service statement in 2023 was correct on the science and evidence, as was the English government’s belief in 2024, that the now redundant badger culling was an ‘ineffective’ disease control policy. The published data and historic record make clear the outcome of all interventions used and in their changing circumstances..

The bovine TB cattle testing monitoring data is generated to be provide evidence of progress in disease control and should be used to learn and adapt measures for future policy. This is what it has achieved for Wales. The scientific evidence in 2026 shows that it is the more careful application of cattle measures, and not persecution of badgers by mass culling or other type of intervention which is required in any determined effort to control bovine TB in cattle herds in Wales.

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ANNEX 1.

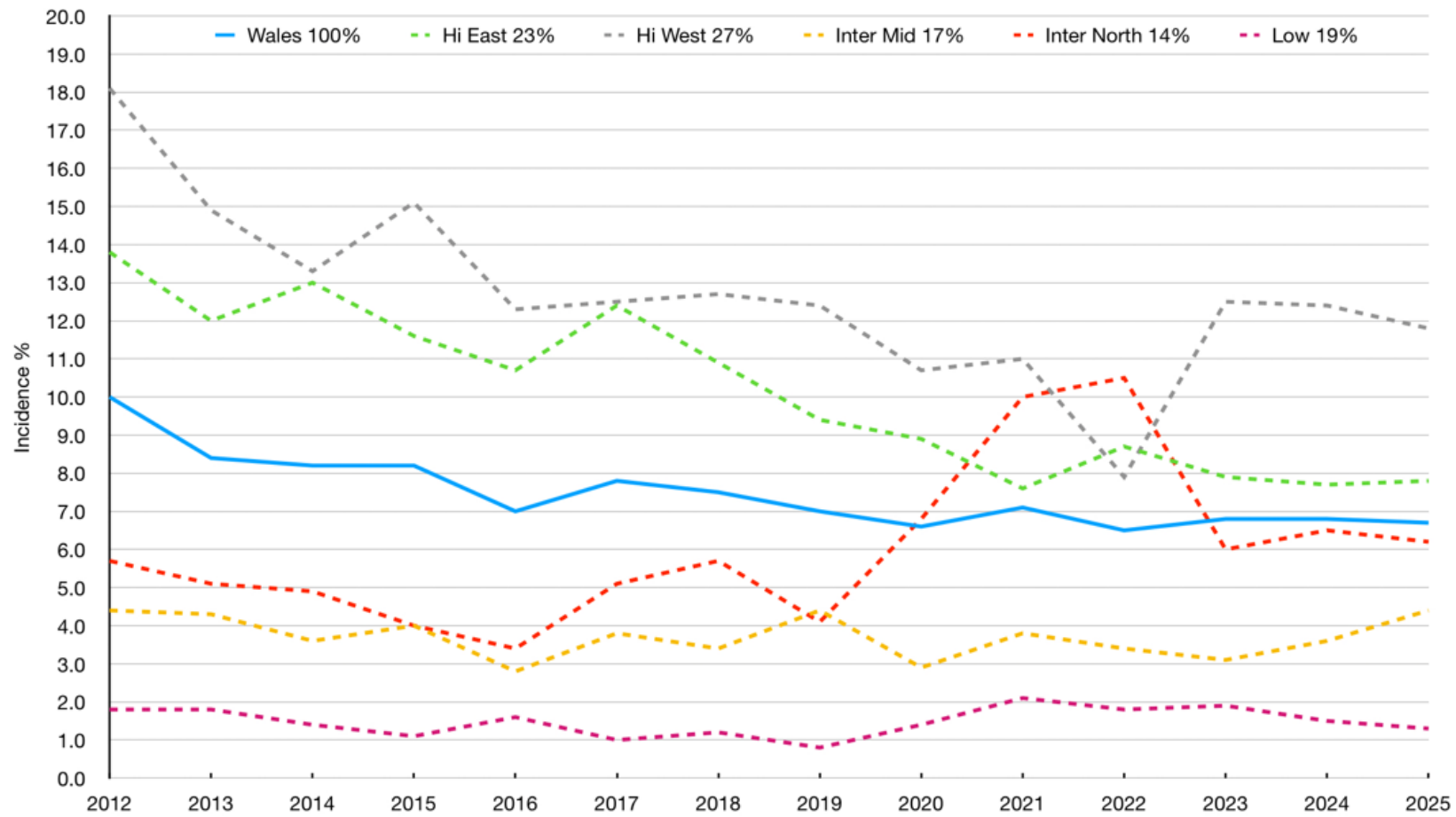


Figure 4a All Wales (blue line) and individual risk area herd incidence 2012-2025

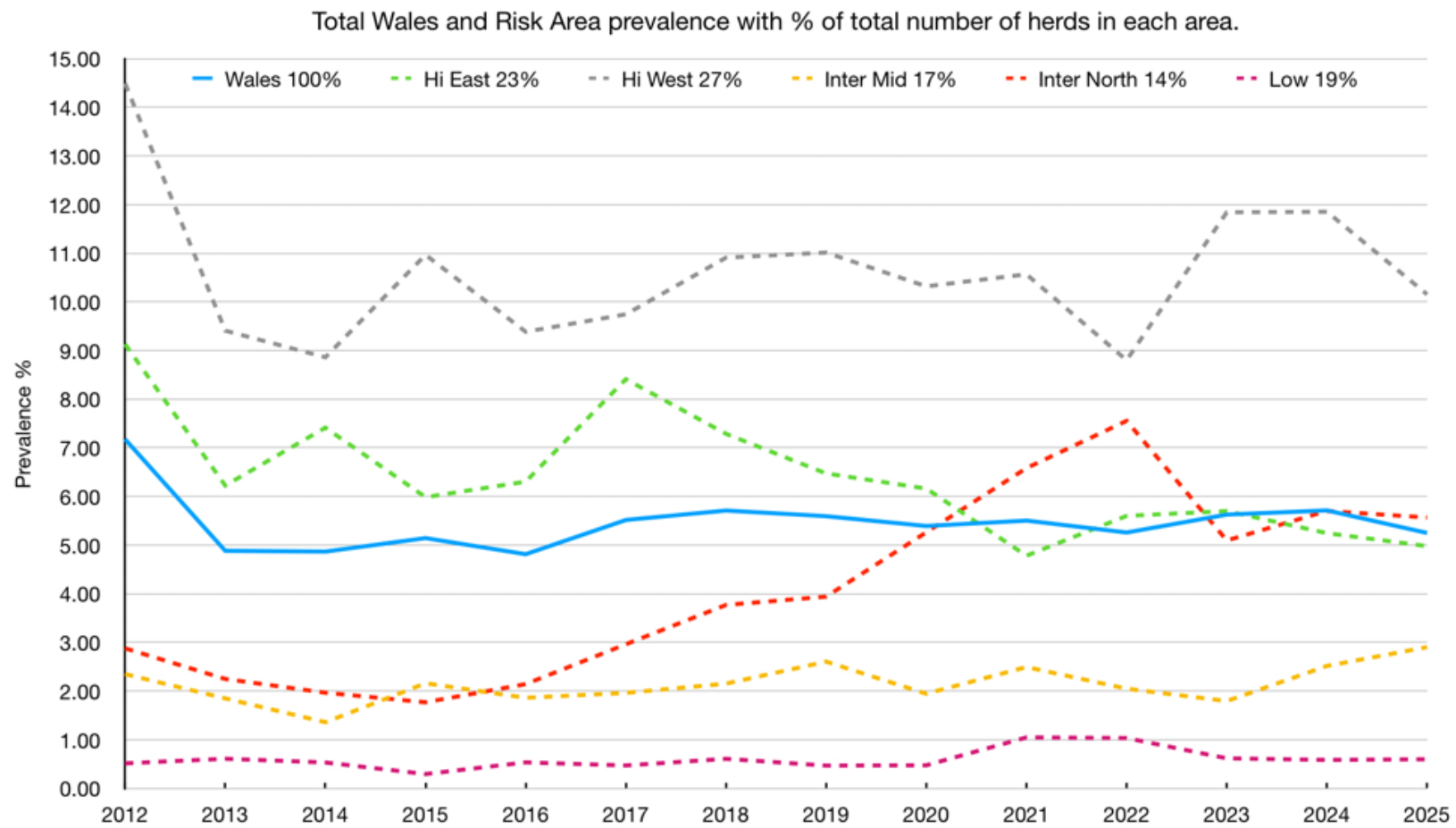


Figure 4b All Wales (blue line) and individual risk area bTB herd prevalence 2012-2025