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trading standards law explained

Calves at market

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England

Calves may not be admitted to market for a number of reasons, including being unfit or under seven days old.

All calves must be correctly identified and have a valid passport to be transported and sold at market.

Food chain information (FCI) must be provided with all calves that are received for slaughter. If you are sending calves to market that are likely to be bought for slaughter, they must be accompanied to the market with an FCI document, although some markets incorporate the required information on their sale entry forms.

A calf is usually defined as a bovine animal under the age of six months. However, article 14 of the Welfare of Animals at Markets Order 1990 defines a calf as "a bovine animal under 12 weeks of age". For the purposes of this guide, the 'six months' definition applies, unless otherwise specified.

Welfare

Calves coming under one or more of the following categories must not be admitted to market:

- Unfit calves (defined as including infirm, diseased, ill, injured and fatigued)
- Calves under seven days old, with or without dam
- Calves with unhealed navels
- Calves less than 10 days old, unless they are transported less than 100 km (approximately 62 miles) to the market
- Calves less than 12 weeks old that have been brought to market on more than one occasion in the previous 28 days

Injury or suffering

No person may cause or permit any injury or unnecessary suffering to an animal in a market, nor transport animals in a way likely to cause injury or undue suffering. Owners and keepers (including those with temporary responsibility such as market operators) have a duty of care to ensure that animals are protected at all times. Animals must be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease. This basic duty of care applies in all situations, including while at market.

The owner (or their agent) of any calf under 12 weeks old in a market, must remove it from the market within four hours of the last calf being sold in the auction that day.

Handling

Calves must not be lifted or dragged by the head, neck, ears, horns, legs, feet or tail. Calves must not be muzzled or tied up. The requirement not to cause injury or suffering by any means is also applicable to the handling of calves.

Excessive force must not be used to control calves, nor any other animal in a market. Animals, including calves, must not be driven or led over uneven or slippery floors that are likely to cause them to slip or fall. Animals must not be obstructed or annoyed in a market.

Use of an instrument capable of inflicting an electric shock is prohibited for use on calves in any market, as is the use of goads and hitting or prodding with a stick or other instrument etc.

Bedding

An adequate supply of suitable bedding must be provided in a market and during transit, and this must be dry when it is provided and be replenished as necessary. The bedding should be sufficient to provide thermal and physical comfort. A thin dusting of sawdust would not be considered adequate.

Pens

No overcrowding is permitted, neither at market nor in transit. Calves must all be able to lie down at the same time. Any pen used must be suitable for the size and species of that animal.

When animals are penned, those of one species must be kept in pens separate from animals of another species (and be distributed within the pens, having regard to differences in age and size), so as to avoid causing them unnecessary suffering.

Any 'fractious' animals must be penned separately.

Documentation required

Cattle passports

All cattle born in or imported into Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) must have a cattle passport. This applies whether the cattle are male or female, dairy or beef, and also applies even if the animal is still on the holding on which it was born. You must ensure that a cattle passport remains with an animal throughout its life.

Therefore, this passport must always accompany the animal to a market and no person may move any calf on to or away from a market premises unless the calf is accompanied by a valid cattle passport. The valid passport must travel to and from the market with the calf.

The auctioneers cannot accept any calf for sale without a valid cattle passport; it is an offence to alter or deface any information in a cattle passport or use a cattle passport for any animal other than the animal for which it was granted.

'Valid', in relation to a cattle passport, means one that has been correctly completed and signed in the appropriate place by each keeper of the animal, and where the identification number and description of the animal in the passport matches the animal and its ear tags.

For more information on passports, see 'Cattle identification'.

Food chain information (FCI)

Food hygiene legislation requires slaughterhouse operators to "request, receive, check and act upon" FCI for all cattle, calves, pigs, poultry, horses, sheep, goats and farmed game sent for slaughter for human consumption. FCI must be provided with all calves that are received for slaughter. If you are sending calves to market that are likely to be bought for slaughter, they must be accompanied to the market by an FCI declaration.

See 'Food chain information' for more details.

Some markets incorporate the required information on their sale entry forms. Please check with the auctioneers.

Animal transport certificate

For the transport of calves over 50 km (approximately 31 miles), the person transporting the animal must carry an animal transport certificate that specifies:

- Origin
- Ownership
- Place of departure

- Date and time of departure
- Intended destination
- Expected duration of the journey

This must be kept for six months following the completion of the journey. For journeys over 65 km (approximately 40 miles), transporters are required to hold a certificate of competence and transporter authorisation. For more information, please see 'Transporting animals by road'.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards Services and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law, please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: July 2026

Key legislation

- Animal Health Act 1981
- Welfare of Animals at Markets Order 1990
- Animal Welfare Act 2006
- Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006
- Cattle Identification Regulations 2007

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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