Bee Health Checker (UK)

www.beezknees.co.uk

Symptoms, confirming checks, severity and recommended actions

Use this guide during hive inspections to match what you can see to likely causes and safe next actions. It is not a diagnosis tool. Where notifiable disease is possible (especially foulbrood), isolate the colony and seek official advice.

Members tip (HiveTag): Log symptoms, photos and follow-up actions in the BeezKnees Members Area inspection pages so you can track what changed between visits. Open Members Area (login) | Medicine Records (UK)

Red flags (act immediately): Ropy larval remains; sunken or perforated cappings with foul smell; widespread 'melted' larvae. Stop inspection early, avoid moving bees/frames/equipment, and seek official confirmation.

Quick inspection workflow: Observe and photograph -> check brood pattern/cappings -> check mite levels if relevant -> record findings -> take the safest first action -> review next inspection.

Symptoms to causes action table

Severity key: Monitor | Act soon | Urgent | Notifiable/Report

Observed symptoms	Confirming checks	Likely cause(s)	Severity	Recommended action
Sunken/perforated cappings; foul smell; larval remains may be 'ropy'	Rope test (matchstick); photograph brood; do not scrape/clean; avoid robbing	American Foulbrood (AFB)	Notifiable/Report	Stop and isolate hive. Do not move bees or equipment. Contact inspector/NBU for confirmation and instructions.
Patchy brood; twisted/melted larvae; discoloured larvae before capping	Photograph brood; check for starvation/chilling; note smell; consider sample via inspector	European Foulbrood (EFB)	Urgent	Reduce stress (feed if needed), avoid swapping frames, seek inspection/confirmation and follow advice.
White/grey mummified larvae ('chalk mummies') on floor/in cells	Check ventilation/damp; look for chilled brood signs; note colony strength	Chalkbrood (caused by Ascosphaera apis)	Act soon	Improve ventilation and dryness. Replace badly affected comb. Consider requeening if persistent.

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Hard, dark, stone-like mummified brood	**Check damp conditions and hygiene; confirm it is brood not debris**	**Stonebrood (Aspergillus spp.)**	**Act soon**	**Remove affected material where practical. Improve hive conditions (dry, well-sited).**
Bees with deformed/crumpled wings; poor flyers; colony dwindles late season	Mite count (alcohol wash/sugar roll/sticky board); check brood for mites; record treatment history	Varroa mites + Deformed Wing Virus (DWV)	Urgent	Confirm mite level and treat appropriately for season. Review IPM plan (monitoring, timing, brood breaks).
Trembling/shaking bees; crawling; sudden adult losses	Check mite level; look for piles of crawling bees; review recent stressors/handling	Paralysis viruses (ABPV/IAPV) often linked to varroa pressure	Act soon	Reduce stress and ensure nutrition. Manage varroa effectively. Avoid combining colonies unless confident you are not spreading issues.
Hairless, shiny black bees near entrance; trembling; crawling clusters	Check for overcrowding/poor ventilation; confirm pattern repeats; check mite levels	Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus (CBPV)	Act soon	Reduce overcrowding, improve ventilation, support nutrition, replace old comb where practical.
Queen cells or pupae turn dark/black; brood in queen cells fails	Confirm it is queen-cell focused; check for Nosema signs; review colony stress/queen quality	Black Queen Cell Virus (BQCV)	Monitor	Improve colony conditions and nutrition; manage varroa; consider requeening if queen performance is affected.
Larvae look like fluid-filled sacs; head raised; larvae yellow-brown	Confirm classic sacbrood appearance; check for chilled brood/stress; photograph	Sacbrood virus	Monitor	Support colony (feed if needed, reduce stress, avoid chilling brood). Requeen if persistent.
Dysentery staining; poor spring build-up; crawling bees	Consider microscopy confirmation if available; check damp/ventilation; review forage/feeding	Nosema (N. apis / N. ceranae)	Act soon	Improve ventilation, reduce damp, replace old comb, support nutrition. Confirm before any medication route.

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Webbing tunnels in comb; frass; frames collapse; often weak colony	Confirm moth damage vs brace comb; check colony strength and unused space; inspect stored comb	Wax moth	Act soon	Remove badly damaged comb. Reduce unused space and strengthen colony; store comb correctly.
Unusual beetles/larvae; slime/fermentation smell; rapid comb damage	Photograph beetles/larvae; avoid moving kit; confirm location history	Small Hive Beetle (SHB) - high concern	Notifiable/Report	Treat as suspect and report promptly through official channels. Do not move bees/equipment until advised.
Small reddish-brown insects on bees; irritation; usually mild	Confirm ID (bee louse) vs mites; look for insects on adults; photograph	Braula coeca (bee louse)	Monitor	Record and monitor. Focus on general colony health; avoid unnecessary treatments unless advised.
Gnawed comb, shredded insulation, debris; strong smell in winter	Look for nesting material/droppings; check entrance size; check for damage to frames	Mice in hive	Act soon	Fit mouse guard, remove contaminated comb, clean and secure hive. Review wintering setup.

Mini callouts by category

Bacterial (brood) issues: If foulbrood is possible, do not move frames. Photograph and seek official confirmation. Good hygiene and comb renewal reduce risk.

Viral issues: Viruses often show up hardest when colonies are stressed or varroa pressure is high. Monitoring and timely varroa control are the biggest levers.

Fungal issues: Chalkbrood and stonebrood are often linked to damp, chilling or weak colonies. Improve ventilation and replace badly affected comb.

Pests and predators: Wax moth and mice are usually secondary problems of weak colonies or poor storage. Fix the underlying conditions as well as the pest.