



Bluetongue and Animal Health & Welfare Grant Update

FEBRUARY 25

Despite the miserable weather, spring isn't too far away hopefully bringing warmer, drier weather. Unfortunately that does mean parasite season will be upon us and it's worth planning ahead for the upcoming risks – particularly Bluetongue virus.

Background

Bluetongue virus is spread by tiny blood-feeding midges, and can infect various domestic ruminants from cattle, sheep, goats through to deer and buffalo. Some bluetongue virus strains can be transferred from mother to foetus during pregnancy and can be spread by needles at injection.

BTV-3 (Bluetongue virus strain 3) has been found in the UK since August 2024 and has steadily made its way across the UK, with 196 confirmed cases (via PCR testing carried out by APHA, as of 21st Jan 2025, in GB) & evidence of BTV-3 circulating within the local midge populations in the control zone. Previously a different strain, BTV-8 (strain 8) has caused outbreaks in England but the current strain appears more virulent based on experiences in Europe last year.

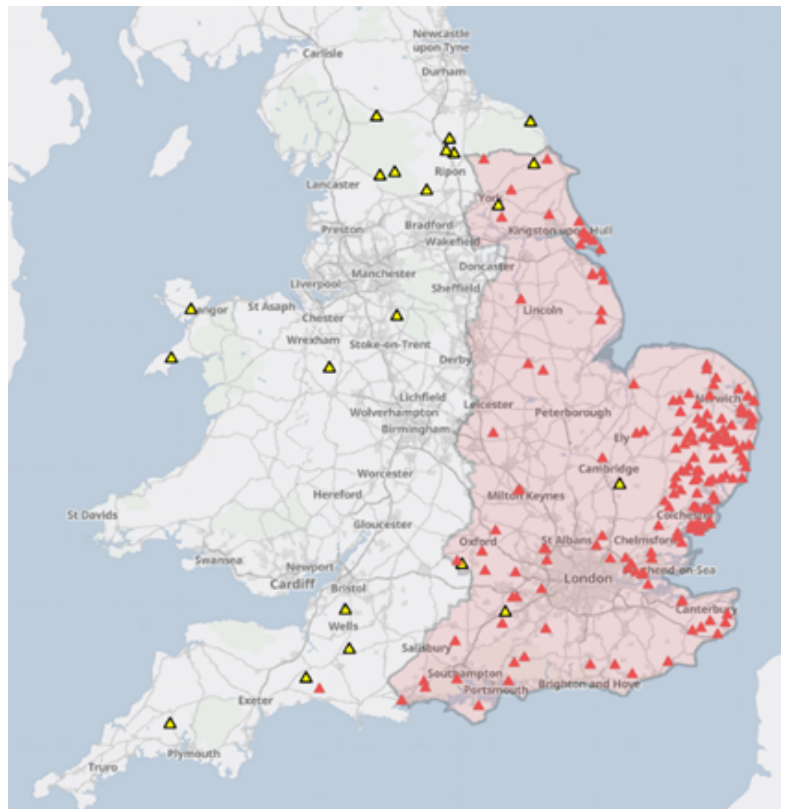
Disease

Bluetongue virus is a notifiable disease and so any suspect cases must be reported via the DEFRA rural helpline 03000 200 301 (in England). It can present similar to 'Foot and mouth' disease.

Sheep tend to show more obvious clinical signs compared to cattle and adult cattle can be infectious for several weeks with little to no signs of disease, acting as reservoirs for virus, which is why it's important to remain vigilant.

Clinical signs in cattle include:

- Off colour – lethargy, fever, milk drop, not eating
- Crusty erosion around the nostrils and muzzle
- Redness of the mouth, eyes, nose
- Reddening of the skin above the hoof
- Nasal discharge
- Reddening / erosion on the teats
- Abortion, foetal deformities, still births



Current UK situation

The disease is very likely to overwinter from 2024 into 2025 and so will therefore reappear earlier than August as seen last year, due to the virus and midges replicating best at warmer temperatures. Generally consistent temperatures above 12C allow for midge activity, but they can survive for a period of time and in pockets/micro-climates such as in buildings. The latest update (as of 21st Jan 2025) indicates the UK is in a seasonally vector low period of transmission risk so there is no longer requirement for:

- Post movement testing of animals moving out of the control zone
- Animals originating from the restricted zone to be slaughtered at a designated slaughterhouse

Many restrictions are still in place including pre-movement testing in the restriction zone, licenses to move animals/germinal produces out of the restriction zone and freezing of germinal products (i.e. semen, eggs, embryos) within the restriction zone.

Control Measures

As midges spread the disease, it would be great if we could prevent midge exposure but unfortunately it only takes one infected midge to bite to infect an animal. Controlling midges is challenging. Housing in an airy, positive pressure ventilated building with external screens of mesh holes <0.5mm could stop midge exposure but aren't practical. Insecticide sprays / dips haven't been proven to be effective against midges and don't help as they have extremely short lived activity and slow speed of kill for midges. On balance with the significant environmental impact insecticides can have it isn't beneficial to use these products for midge control.

The main tool we can use is vaccination. Currently BTV-3 vaccination is authorized in England and we have access to Bultvato-3 vaccine. For cattle over 1 month old, requiring 2 x doses, 3 weeks apart and full immunity takes 3 weeks to develop.



Deciding whether to vaccinate or not is a risk based decision that individual farmers need to consider and it's worth discussing with your vet. As a guide the industry has produced a risk assessment form to help. We have to bear in mind like with all vaccines, it doesn't guarantee prevention of infection but will offer some protection and reduce the severity of disease.

If you decide to go ahead with vaccination please get in contact, as there are some specific details/hoops we have to jump through.

As mentioned, livestock movements can also increase the spread of BTV-3 so avoiding purchasing of cattle within the control zone will help reduce further spread.

Risk assessment questions to consider

What is the expected value of calves? – high value / pedigree breeding vs. commercial animals

Where are you in the UK? – density of ruminants in your area, close to / within the control zone

Do you plan to buy in animals from other parts of the country?

Can you avoid high risk midge breeding areas?

Consider the stage of pregnancy – non pregnant or mid-pregnancy is higher risk

When do you want to use breeding males & how many are you expecting them to mate? – want to avoid vaccination within 2 months of breeding

Do you want to export animals or germplasm out of the UK?

UPDATE ON THE ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE REVIEW GRANT SCHEME

Hopefully you have heard about the 'Animal Health and Welfare' review grant scheme, if not feel free to get in contact to discuss or more info can be found on <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/funding-to-improve-animal-health-and-welfare-guidance-for-farmers-and-vets>. They've recently announced some changes to update you on including new additional payment rates!

- Farmers with at least 11 dairy cattle are now eligible to have a "Follow-up" whereas previously only beef cattle herds were eligible for this
- If a vet recommends a PI hunt for BVD control, beef and dairy cattle herds can utilize 'Follow-up' funding for this
- New additional payment rates:
 - £837 for Beef cattle 'Follow-up' if the BVD review is negative and a PI hunt is carried out
 - £1714 for Dairy cattle 'Follow-up' if the BVD review is positive OR if the BVD review is negative and a PI hunt is carried out
 - £215 for Dairy cattle 'Follow-up' if the BVD review is negative and no PI hunt is carried out

Increased medicine delivery service for clients:

From the 3rd March we will be doubling our medicine delivery capacity and collection locations. We have added collection points in Bristol, Berkeley, Gloucester, Cirencester, Cheltenham, Northleach and Devizes areas. We will deliver to all locations every day, Monday to Friday. Keep your eyes peeled for more details via email and social media.



Vet Tech Update



We now offer an udder singeing service to help your herd have less mastitis cases and be easier to clean in the parlour.

Give the office a call 01666 823035 option 1 or contact Rosie on 07500 311382.



Ellie Body

MEDICINE+HUB

Click here www.medicinehub.org.uk for more about the livestock industry's Medicine Hub. It is an online tool to help record medicine use in cattle and sheep which is widely supported by the livestock sector as a means of demonstrating responsible antibiotic use, as well being useful in managing the health and welfare of stock on your farm. Data can be uploaded directly onto the hub through a number of routes, one of the most straightforward being via the practice sharing medicine sales data. It is all stored securely and confidentially. Get in touch with the practice if you want to find out more.



COMPASSION RESPECT INTEGRITY SUSTAINABILITY PROGRESSION CARE

T: 01666 823035 Option "1" for visits or enquiries, "2" for medicines, "3" for TB testing

**** Early 2025 Course Programme ****

Foot Trimming

First Aid for Feet: Wednesday 12th February, Old Sodbury - £300 + VAT

Intermediate Foot Trimming Courses will be organised according to demand so please let us know if you are interested



AI Courses - £550 + VAT

Wednesday 26th-28th March - Location - TBC

Short Courses - £75 + VAT

Care and Assessment of the Sick Cow including Down Cow Management:

Tuesday 4th February, 1pm-4pm, Kington Langley, Chippenham.

Calving the Cow: Tuesday 18th February, 2pm-4pm, Malmesbury

Youngstock management: Wednesday 5th February, 1-4pm. Location TBC



**For more information or to book a place on any of our courses
please call the office on:**

01666 823035 or E: technical.training@georgevetgroup.co.uk