

Farm news

February 2025



Avian Influenza update Fay Pooley MRCVS

Please remember to keep an eye on the latest updates from the APHA on the avian influenza (bird flu) situation.

In response to the increase in cases across England and new findings in wild birds, an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) with mandatory biosecurity measures came into force across all of England and Scotland on 25th January 2025. Please see the government guidance on biosecurity and hygiene standards to keep your birds safe from bird flu (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bird-flu-avian-influenza-how-to-prevent-it-and-stop-it-spreading>).

As of 27th January, apart from Lincolnshire there are no areas in the East Midlands where mandatory bird housing is required, but the situation can change very quickly so please do be vigilant.

Bluetongue Virus update Carolyn Baguley MRCVS, with thanks to BCVA for their information.

It's likely that BTV-3 will have overwintered and will therefore emerge to start circulating earlier in 2025 than it did in 2024. The general feeling among government vets is that there are likely to be fewer movement restrictions in 2025 than there were in 2024 if infection is more widespread. The restrictions did a good job of protecting the livestock-dense areas of the country in 2024 but did cause some problems of their own, especially for farmers affected financially.

On 21st January 2025 the UK entered the seasonally vector low period (SVLP) meaning the risk of transmission of bluetongue is now very low. The total number of confirmed cases in Great Britain for the 2024-2025 vector season is 196 (194 in England and 2 high risk move cases in Wales).

Entering the SVLP has meant there has been some changes for those in the restriction zone:

- Animals moving out of the restriction zone no longer require a post movement test.

- There is now no requirement for the use of vector control including the use of insecticides.
- Animals from the restriction zone no longer need to use a designated slaughterhouse.

Some restrictions do remain in place:

- Pre-movement testing in the restriction zone is still a requirement.
- Livestock keepers must still have a licence to move animals or germinal products out of the restriction zone.
- Any post movement testing requirements set out in the licence or restriction notice if animals were moved out of the restricted zone on or before 20 January 2025 must still be complied with.
- A licence is still required to freeze germinal products in the restriction zone.

APHA have created a Bluetongue case map that shows the location of all premises in Great Britain that have had one or more cases of BTV-3 confirmed by PCR. The map also shows the current restriction zones, infected zones and density maps for cattle and sheep numbers: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/4867f4e1f680415898482df7aabb703d/page/Page/>

Although we have now entered the SVLP, we must remain vigilant and report any suspicion of disease immediately. Foetal deformities, stillbirths, abortions and neurological symptoms in calves and lambs may all be signs of BTV-3 so if you suspect this, please contact us or Defra/APHA (via the Defra rural services helpline on 03000 200 301). Don't forget that the clinical signs of Foot and Mouth disease can be very similar to those of BTV-3 and, given the recent FMD case in Germany, reporting any suspect cases is more important now than ever.

Vaccination

Have you decided what to do about vaccinating your stock? For many farmers, it'll be easier to vaccinate stock now when they are housed and before many peoples' main lambing and calving seasons start, and when valuable

breeding males are unlikely to be used for months (and therefore any temporary effects of the vaccine on sperm quality shouldn't matter). In the SVLP, when active BTV in livestock is very unlikely and needles therefore won't spread infection between animals, there is also less of a requirement for a new needle per animal when vaccinating!

Vaccinated animals only get full protection 3-4 weeks after the primary course, so if they're not vaccinated in advance of BTV infection reaching the herd or flock, it's likely to be too late to protect them from severe clinical signs.

All farmers in England can now vaccinate their livestock under a General Licence, which means they can just order the vaccine from their vet without first having to apply to Defra for permission. There are some conditions that need to be complied with, and we can help you navigate these.

The BTV vaccine risk assessment template included with this month's newsletter was designed to help farmers decide whether and when to vaccinate. It's a really useful document - have a look!

Questions for vets to ask clients to help decision of whether to vaccinate against BTV3 (Dec 24)	Answers						Comments
	5	4	3	2	1	0	
	More answers in this column indicates increased reasons for you to vaccinate					More answers in this column suggests lower reasons to vaccinate	
1. Do you have cattle or sheep &/or other ruminants or camelids?	Yes					No	Clinical signs and severe symptoms are much more likely in sheep than other ruminants but there is logic in vaccination of cattle as they play a very important role in spreading the disease.
2. What is the expected value of the lambs/calves/kids/cria of this flock/herd?	High, valuable breeding animals, rare breed, pedigree.		Average value stock, commercial finishing animals.				
3. Where are you in the UK?	High risk, coastal area in south/east England.				Remote peninsula off the north-west coast of England, no other ruminants on the peninsula & no imports.		If you are not currently vaccinating due to your location, be prepared to keep a watching brief on the location of cases of BTV3 through the 2025 season.
4. What was the prevalence of disease in 2024 in the geographical location of your farm?	There were cases of BTV3 in farms local to me in 2024.		There were no cases of BTV3 in our area in 2024.				It is expected that BTV3 will be more widespread in the UK in 2025 than 2024.
5. What is the density of ruminants in your immediate location?	There are lots of ruminant farms in this area.				My farm is remote from other ruminant farms.		Bear in mind that BTV3 is spread by midges which can fly several miles (~20 miles over land and further over water).
6. Do you plan to move animals from other parts of the country into your flock/herd?	I want to buy in animals &/or I plan to travel animals back home from distant sales or shows.				I will not be moving animals back to my holding from elsewhere in the country.		Midges can be carried in vehicles and BTV3 will also spread the movement of infected animals. Note there is a lag period between animals becoming infected but before clinical signs are apparent.



<p>7. What is the topography of your farm?</p>	<p>There is a restricted area for ruminants on my farm and I don't have options of low-midge areas to move them to.</p>	<p>Either I have an area of the farm which is windy and exposed or I have buildings with midge-proof netting & ventilation and it is realistic for me to keep my ruminants there all summer.</p>	<p>Note that housing ruminants in poorly ventilated buildings may increase their risk of midge bites.</p>
<p>8. How does the vaccination regimen fit in with your handling and management calendars.</p>	<p>Easy to vaccinate and it fits well with existing management.</p>	<p>Difficult to vaccinate due to lack of facilities or ability to handle stock.</p>	<p>Note that in low risk BTV3 period, the risks of using the same needle for more than one animal is the same as for any other product.</p>
<p>9. Consider stage of pregnancy of female animals.</p>	<p>The animals are not pregnant or are in mid pregnancy.</p>	<p>The animals are very early pregnancy or near to giving birth.</p>	<p>In early pregnancy, vaccination stress could impact implantation of the early foetus. Near to giving birth, immune response may be compromised.</p>
<p>10. How many breeding males do you have on your holding?</p>	<p>I only have a few breeding males and I expect them each to serve lots of females.</p>	<p>I have lots of male animals that would be capable of breeding even if some became ill to work.</p>	<p>Each breeding male is valuable and should be a priority to protect.</p>
<p>11. Consider stage of breeding for males.</p>	<p>The reproductive cycle is at a stage where males are not required for at least 2 months.</p>	<p>The males are to be used for breeding within the next 2 months.</p>	<p>Note that BTV3 disease will impact breeding success and semen quality (more than vaccination will) as well as transmit the virus.</p>
<p>12. Consider your herd/flock objectives and future plans to export.</p>	<p>I do not intend selling either animals or germplasm for export out of the UK.</p>	<p>I would like to sell breeding stock and germplasm to other countries.</p>	<p>There may be ongoing impacts of having seropositive animals on future export of either live animals or germplasm.</p>
<p>13. Consider the effectiveness of each vaccine and the claims they each make.</p>	<p>I am keen to reduce the severity of BTV3 disease in my animals.</p>	<p>I will only vaccinate if it guarantees prevention of infection.</p>	<p>The available vaccines are different from each other though there is limited information currently available.</p>

The temperature has to be above 12^o celsius for the virus to multiply in the midges. Below this is the transmission free period, though there is a lag after the temperature drops when infected midges are still flying and can still transmit disease.

It has been unseasonably cold and windy.

It has been unseasonably warm.

14. What have the weather conditions been?

Other considerations to make re BTV3

- Good farm biosecurity practices can help reduce the risk of disease outbreaks. Specifically, with BTV3, this means take care moving animals large distances. Moving an infected animal into a currently free area will risk infecting the local midge population and starting a new outbreak.
- BTV3 is spread by midges so all farms are at risk. Housed animals may be at a reduced risk especially if ventilation rates in the buildings are high. Ensure that ventilation does not compromise welfare. Midge activity varies during the day and is high at dusk.
- Concurrent disease in a flock or herd (eg BVDv, parasitism, poor nutrition) may influence the immune status of the animals and their ability to respond to vaccination.
- BTV can be spread by needles at injection. When vaccinating, consider the frequency of needle changes & ideally it should be between every animal. This is particularly important to consider if vaccinating within an area where there is active disease present and during the vector period.

[For detailed information about these vaccines then go to the BTV Vaccine Comparison table made for UK vets.](#)

- There are currently three unauthorised vaccines available in the UK (Bluevac 3 distributed by Ceva Animal Health; Syvazul BTV distributed by Virbac UK & Bultavo-3 distributed by Boehringer Ingelheim).

[Recommendations can be accessed at BTV3 - information for vets - Ruminant Health & Welfare \(ruminanthw.org.uk\).](#)

- All three vaccines have been used in goats and camelids in Europe & each of the companies may have more information that they can share with individual veterinary surgeons on a one-to-one basis. The British Veterinary Camelid Society and the Goat Veterinary Society have issued specific recommendations for their members.

Vaccination Decision Maker compiled early December 2024 with input from each of the following organisations -



Farm and Equine Centre
 Markeaton Lane, Markeaton, Derby DE22 4NH
 01332 294929

Alfreton 01773 304900
 Pride Veterinary Centre 01332 678333

Allstree 01322 554422
 Shelton Lock 01332 700321

Hilton 01283 732999
 Stapenhill 01283 568162

Langley Mill 01773 304914

Mickleover 01332 518585

Oakwood 01332 666500