



# Farm news

March 2024

## Schmallenberg Virus (SBV)

Fay Pooley BVMedSci BVM BVS CertAVP(CP) MRCVS



This spring and summer we expect to see a significant re-emergence of SBV. There have already been a number of reported cases of deformities in lambs in this country, including the Midlands, throughout January and February.

Schmallenberg is a virus carried by midges, and it first arrived in the UK in 2012 when infected midges were blown over from Europe. SBV affects sheep, cattle, goats and potentially camelids. APHA are currently carrying out free SBV testing on any deformed foetuses you have born on farm - just call the practice to arrange this if required.

Schmallenberg has multiple effects on different species. In adult cattle, signs include reduced milk yield, inappetence, high temperature, loss of body condition and diarrhoea. The (more pressing) issue is that it can cross the placenta to the calf. Foetuses appear to be worst affected when infection occurs from day 62-180 gestation, and deformities include bent limbs (deformities may be all limbs and spine, or only some limbs or joints), brain deformities and damage to the spinal cord. Fixed flexion/fusion of the joints is very common. Some animals are born with a normal appearance but have nervous signs such as a 'dummy' presentation (blindness, wobbliness, going down, an inability to suck, and sometimes seizures).

Adult sheep and goats don't show much in the way of clinical disease but foetuses are affected in the same way as calves, the most severe signs being seen when infection occurs from day 25 - 50 gestation.

It would be nice to think that we could prevent this disease by protecting animals from midges and by vaccination. However, avoiding midges is hard and there is no evidence to suggest that there are any efficacious midge-repellent products on the market. There was a SBV vaccine available previously, but this has now been discontinued and is unlikely to return to the market.

Since early mating/lambing flocks and spring calving herds will likely be worst affected, based on our experience of previous outbreaks, the only realistic option available to us to reduce the impact of disease is to move mating to later, to avoid exposure to midges of animals that are in the susceptible stages of pregnancy. This is difficult though, as midge activity can be hard to predict.

So far, we have seen SBV outbreaks in the UK every 3-5 years. The good news for now is that there's likely to be little circulation of SBV next year, and animals affected this year will be unlikely to have another affected pregnancy. Unlike Bluetongue, SBV isn't a notifiable disease. However, we often can't tell by just looking at deformed foetuses whether the deformities are caused by SBV, BTV or BVD, so testing is important.



*Undershot jaws like this are another type of deformity that can be seen in SBV-affected lambs.*

## Bluetongue

Erin Beever BVMS BSc MRCVS



As warmer weather approaches, you may hear more about Bluetongue Virus (BTV). BTV is a virus that affects ruminants and camelids. It was originally discovered in Southern Europe but with changes in weather, it has made its way further north. The first outbreak of BTV in the UK was in 2007. In autumn 2023, cattle and sheep positive for BTV were found in Norfolk and Kent during routine surveillance.

BTV is spread primarily by Culicoides midges which are most active between April and November. However, it can be spread through semen and across the placenta to foetuses. Clinical signs vary but tend to be more severe in sheep with up to 30% of infected animals dying. You may see high temperatures, swollen faces, blue tongues, excess salivation, difficulty breathing, or signs of lameness. In cattle, clinical signs tend to be milder and can include discharge from the eyes, excess salivation, reduced milk yield and poor fertility. In some cases, infected animals may not show any signs of disease or if infected when pregnant, may have stillborn or weak offspring.

BTV has numerous different serotypes, so while there are vaccines available, none protect against the current circulating serotype, BTV-3. There is limited evidence that insect repellents can prevent infection, but use of midge netting or fans may be beneficial for protecting high value animals. Treatment is supportive but tends to be ineffective. If you suspect BTV, please notify your veterinarian as it is a notifiable disease and must be reported to APHA.

If you'd like to know more, and to keep abreast of the current situation, head over to Ruminant Health & Welfare's website at <https://ruminanthw.org.uk/bluetongue-virus/>. This is an excellent source of information on BTV and is updated regularly.



Two of our Client Care Advisors, Charlotte and Rin, recently attended a Mental Health Awareness Course, covering all aspects of mental health within the farming community.

The course was run by the DPJ Foundation (Daniel Picton Jones) which was set up in July 2016 following the death of Daniel, a farmer from Pembrokeshire who took his own life after suffering from poor mental health.

His widow, Emma, decided to set up the foundation to support the mental health of those in the farming sector.

Agriculture carries one of the highest rates of suicide. Poor mental health in agriculture is recognised as a big problem across society.

Farming is an excellent career and can provide huge benefits to those who work in the sector. However, it is a career that comes with huge pressure, isolation and demand on a daily basis and it is often difficult to reach out for help. Sometimes it's easier to talk to a stranger than relatives or friends.



There are many organisations and helplines specific to the farming community that offer listening and support.

One in four people suffer from poor mental health at some point in their lives.

One in six people are experiencing poor mental health at any one time.

One in five people have suicidal thoughts.

In 2018, 6,507 people died by suicide, compared to 1,784 people dying on the roads.

94% of farmers under 40 believe mental health is the biggest danger facing the industry.

36% of farmers are probably depressed.

We have copies of the Yellow Wellies Farm Safety Foundation's "Little Book of Minding Your Head" in reception which is a perfect guide for mental health awareness on your farm.

Please remember we are always here.

*"Nobody else can walk in your shoes but we can listen and try to understand."*

## Badger Setts Surveys

Don't forget there is still funding available for trained TBAS advisers to carry out badger sett surveys on your farm. If you don't already know where the badger setts are on your farm, or haven't had a survey carried out already, then this could be a good chance to have one done. The best time to do badger sett surveys is in spring, between March and May. Please call the clinic if you're interested.



## FlockCheck 2024



MSD Animal Health, the makers of toxovax and enzovax, are running their FlockCheck scheme again this year, which will run from now until June. It is designed for flocks with 100 or more breeding ewes, but if you're interested in accessing the funding and your flock is smaller than that, please speak to us.

Blood samples are taken from 6-8 barren or aborted ewes and tested for antibodies against *Chlamydia abortus* (EAE) and *Toxoplasma gondii*, two of the most common causes of abortion in ewes. MSD will pay the lab fees for these samples.

The testing is designed for ewes that were scanned in lamb and then never lambed, or ones that were known to abort (the antibodies start to wane after 3 months and so there's a risk of false negatives if ewes that never got in lamb are tested). It's not suitable for ewes that have been vaccinated against these two diseases.

If you've had early/mid pregnancy losses or later abortions in your flock and would like to access the funding, please speak to one of our vets.

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

**Alfreton**  
01773 304900

**Pride Veterinary Centre**  
01332 678333

**Allestree**  
01332 554422

**Shelton Lock**  
01332 700321

**Hilton**  
01283 732999

**Stapenhill**  
01283 568162

**Langley Mill**  
01773 304914

**Stretton**  
01283 565333

**Mickleover**  
01332 518585

**Wollaton**  
01159 676586

**Oakwood**  
01332 666500