

Q&A following announcement of seasonally vector low period for bluetongue

02 February 2024

The following FAQs are being shared to help clarify details for farmers in the bluetongue temporary control zones (TCZ) following the announcement of the seasonally low vector activity and subsequent changes to disease control measures made by Defra on 01 February 2024.

Responses have been collated by the Ruminant Health Welfare group and are correct at time of issue. Importantly, the situation continues to evolve; you are advised to check the Gov.UK and RHW websites for updates and the latest advice.

Q. What has changed since Defra's announcement on 01 February 2024?

A. Defra has announced a seasonally vector low period for the BTV-3 virus.

This means that due to the reduced risk from midges, some restrictions on movements of live animals from the Temporary Control Zones (TCZ) can now be eased if they meet certain conditions, including testing negative in a pre-movement test. A licence is still required.

Restrictions on movements of animals into and within the TCZs have also been eased.

Q. What is a seasonally vector low period?

A. Due to various factors including a decrease in temperature, we are now in a seasonally vector low period, which is when midge activity is much lower, and they are not actively feeding.

Low temperatures also mean that the virus cannot replicate in the midge, so even if a midge does feed on an infected animal, the risk of transmission to another animal is low.

Q. Will animals still be culled when they test positive for BTV-3?

A. Considering current environmental and vector conditions, Defra have taken the decision not to cull infected animals where test results indicate older infection and the presence of BTV antibodies. This is because their risk of spread of the virus is extremely low. Infected animals will still be restricted at their current locations and other disease mitigation measures taken as appropriate.

Q. Can I move my animals if I am in a TCZ?

A. Strict rules on the movement of livestock from regions affected by bluetongue are already in place. Farmers are reminded that animals moved from these regions must be accompanied by the relevant licences.

It is possible for some animals that were previously prevented from moving out of the TCZ to now move out of the TCZ. Animals that move must meet certain conditions which are detailed in the licence, including testing negative in a pre-movement test. You can also move animals direct to slaughter at a designated abattoir.

If you wish to move animals onto, out of or within the TCZ a licence is required – apply here: [Bluetongue: apply for a specific movement licence - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bluetongue-apply-for-a-specific-movement-licence) .

During the seasonally vector low period it is also possible to move animals between farms under a general licence although you will need to check whether the destination premises has already completed its official BTV-3 surveillance testing. Further details can be found [here](#)

Q. What testing do I need to undertake to move my animals from a TCZ?

You should apply for a licence in the usual way giving at least 5-days' notice. If pre-movement testing is required you may need to allow more time to get a pre-movement test. If you have a valid surveillance sample and negative test results taken on or after 18 January this may be sufficient to allow the licence to be granted. If pre- or post-movement (post movement tests are only required for urgent welfare moves) testing is required, you will be advised by APHA what testing is required. The following steps are likely to be required:

1. Keeper arranges with their private veterinary surgeon to take 1x EDTA blood sample (purple top tube) for RT-PCR and 1x plain blood sample (red top tube) for serological analysis from each animal. This must be paid for by the keeper.

2. The veterinary surgeon will complete a [sample submission form, available on the Pirbright website](#).
 3. On the sample submission form, the veterinary surgeon is to select both options for RT-PCR and serology testing for bluetongue virus.
 4. The veterinary surgeon is to write in the additional information section of the sample submission form that this submission is for (specify as appropriate) pre-/post-movement testing.
 5. The veterinary surgeon is to write in bold at the top of the form: 'TCZ moves'.
 6. The veterinary surgeon is to package the sample in a way that prevents leaking.
 7. The veterinary surgeon will send the package by Royal Mail, ideally through next day delivery, addressing it to:
NVRL, The Pirbright Institute, Ash Road, Pirbright, Woking, GU24 0NF
 8. Pirbright will complete the tests for bluetongue and will send the results by email to the veterinary surgeon and the APHA licencing team. Results are usually returned within a week. Government will pay for the cost of testing but not sampling)
- You will not be granted a licence for any animal that does not test negative for both PCR and serology.

Q. Who takes the BTV-3 samples for a pre movement test?

A. Your usual vet will be able to take samples for a pre movement test for you. However, if you had compulsory BTV sampling done on or after 18 January 2024, please see the question below.

Q. My animals have just been tested by APHA, do I need to retest them?

A. This depends on when that test was done. If your sampling was on or after 18 January 2024, APHA will have collected two samples:

One will have been tested for virus (RT-PCR test any virus positive animals will have been notified to the owner). The other has been stored at the lab and it may be possible to test the second sample for antibodies.

It is important that you indicate on your licence application that your animals have been sampled tested.

For animals to be moved, both virus and antibody tests must be negative.

Blood samples that are stored can deteriorate over time and some stored samples may become unsuitable for testing. In this case, you will be required to ask your own vet to collect further samples. Additionally, it is worth noting that retrieving samples can take time.

If your move is urgent, for example to move in-lamb ewes ahead of spring lambing, you should consider asking your vet to retest all animals and resubmit samples asap. Farmers will be responsible for the veterinary costs for sampling involved, Defra will fund the cost of testing.

Q. My animals have recently been tested and one has been identified as positive but not culled.

Can I move this animal?

Can I move other animals from my farm?

Is there an increased risk of spread on my farm?

A. The risk at this point is considered low. However, until sufficient time has elapsed for the animal to clear any virus from its body, it will not be permitted to move.

Other animals may be moved from the farm under licence (see details of licence requirements) with pre movement testing.

If the animal is pregnant, or is an entire male, there is a risk of transmission to the foetus or through semen. Please seek advice from APHA. If the animal is not pregnant and is not an entire male, it is likely these animals will have natural immunity and it would be advantageous to keep these animals in a herd or flock.

Q. Should I be culling infected animals?

A. Defra has taken the decision not to cull infected animals where test results indicate older infection and the presence of BTV-3 antibodies, which means they now have increased natural immunity to the disease.

Infected animals will be restricted at their current locations and other disease mitigation measures taken as appropriate.

It is not advised to cull these animals purely for testing positive

Q. Does bluetongue pose a threat to human health or food safety?

A. No, the disease does not affect meat or animal products, and meat and milk from infected animals are safe to eat and drink. Over and above this, we carry out compulsory post-import testing of susceptible animals from areas around and known to have BTV infected regions.