

Bluetongue virus: Be prepared for a possible outbreak

Know how to spot and report suspected cases

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) has confirmed there is a very high probability of a new introduction of bluetongue serotype 3 (BTV-3) into livestock in Great Britain in 2024.

The virus affects cattle, sheep, goats, deer, alpacas and llamas and is spread by biting midges. It can also be transmitted via infected germinal products and can be passed on maternally from mother to unborn offspring. The disease does not affect meat or animal products. Meat and milk from infected animals are safe to eat and drink.

Bluetongue is a notifiable disease with cases having been found across northern Europe. Cases were detected in England between November 2023 and March 2024 after infected midges were blown over from the continent. It's a different serotype from the 2008 outbreak with no authorised vaccine currently available.

Biting midges are most active between April and November and counties along the south and east coasts of England are most at risk of a wind-borne incursion given their proximity to northern Europe.

Keepers of ruminants and camelids can help minimise the potential spread of bluetongue by:

- Checking the health of animals and

reporting any suspicious clinical signs which can include fever, crusting and ulcers around muzzle area, swollen head, salivating and lameness. In severe cases it can cause abortions, malformations, and death in animals.

- Registering all livestock with APHA.
- Registering all land and buildings used to keep livestock, even short term lets, with APHA so the location of susceptible animals can be traced to help prevent and control disease.
- Taking advantage of the free testing on offer for animals moving from the highest risk counties to live elsewhere in Great Britain to guard against the movement of undetected disease to new areas - *clinical signs are not always apparent despite infection and testing can help prevent a silent spread.*

If new cases are detected, control measures will be used to minimise impact until a safe and effective vaccine becomes available. These measures will include the implementation of disease control zones and movement restrictions of susceptible species and their germinal products within these zones. Keepers in these zones may need to apply for licences and test their animals before and in some cases after moving them. Limited culling of infected

animals may also be undertaken if it's believed this could contain and eradicate disease.

More information on the approach to controlling the disease in England in 2024 can be found in the BTV-3 Disease Control Framework on gov.uk. The situation is being monitored in Scotland and Wales where the risk of disease is currently considered lower.

Bluetongue is a notifiable disease. If you do not report it, you're breaking the law.

If you suspect bluetongue, you must report it immediately by calling:

- 03000 200 301 in England
- 03003 038 268 in Wales
- Your local Field Services Office in Scotland

Visit gov.uk/bluetongue for more information on clinical signs, free testing and applying for movement licences.



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