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BLUE TONGUE UPDATE

May 2025

Midge season is about on us and BTV (Blue Tongue Virus), which is a **notifiable disease** in ruminants, is carried by midges. BTV was rife last year on the continent with over 6000 cases in Germany in the last midge season. There are many cases occurring in SE England, parts of Yorkshire and one confirmed in cattle last month in Lancashire. The “Restricted Zone” is over many of the counties of SE England and up the east coast. It was extended in February into Somerset, East Devon and Wiltshire. For up-to-date information on the disease please see <https://ruminanthw.org.uk/bluetongue-virus/>.

There is also a good farmer leaflet on Bluetongue : <https://ruminanthw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Bluetongue-farmer-leaflet-Jan-25-1.pdf>

The virus is spread by infected midges which can be blown long distances by wind. The midges are infected when biting an infected sheep or cow, so movement of infected animals also allows a new population of midges to be infected in a different part of the country. Finally, an infected midge bites a sheep or cow and the animal is then infected. Infected sheep get very ill and often die. Adult cattle may serve as source of virus for several weeks while displaying little or no clinical signs of disease and are often the preferred host for midges. Abortion, calves born small, weak, deformed or blind have all been reported in confirmed Blue tongue cases:

Clinical signs of bluetongue		
Sheep	Cattle	Calves
<p>Sheep are more likely to show obvious clinical signs of bluetongue, these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ulcers or sores in the mouth and nose• Discharge from the eyes or nose and drooling from the mouth• Swelling of the lips, tongue, head and neck and the coronary band (where the skin of the leg meets the horn of the foot)• Other clinical signs:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Red skin as a result of blood collecting beneath the surface◦ Fever◦ Lameness◦ Breathing problems◦ Abortion◦ Death	<p>Signs of the disease include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lethargy• Crusty erosions around the nostrils and muzzle• Redness of the mouth, eyes and nose• Reddening of the skin above the hoof• Nasal discharge• Reddening and erosions on the teats• Fever• Milk drop• Not eating• Abortion <p>Adult cattle may serve as a source of virus for several weeks while displaying little or no clinical signs of disease and are often the preferred host for insect vectors.</p>	<p>Calves can become infected with bluetongue before birth if the mother is infected while pregnant.</p> <p>Signs of infection include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calves born small, weak, deformed or blind• Death of calves within a few days of birth• Abortions <p>Livestock keepers and vets should consider bluetongue as a possible cause for calves showing these signs.</p>

There are 3 vaccines available against Blue Tongue Virus and you may wish to consider vaccinating to protect your herd/flock in the advent of this disease reaching our area. None of the vaccines prevent infection, but they are designed to reduce the multiplication of the virus in the blood stream, and therefore reduce signs of the disease. Vaccine take-up has been huge in SE England and in the restricted zone generally. Supplies of the vaccine are therefore tight. At the time of writing, we are expecting to be able to source some in mid to late May.

Bultavo-3 vaccine is given from one month old, as one dose for sheep and a course of two for cattle with a 3week gap. It will cost £3 per dose, and we advise ordering both doses at once as supplies are likely to be inconsistent. If you would like to place an order, please let us know how many sheep/cows you are doing and how many doses you require.

Safety of the use of vaccine in male animals has not been established however after use in the Netherlands it is not contra-indicated, it should be noted that male animals contracting the disease would be badly affected in comparison to the response to a dead vaccine.

*NEMATODIRUS in lambs is now very high risk according to the SCOPS forecast. White wormer is recommended in lambs in the next week or so especially if they are established lambs eating grass and starting to scour.

<https://www.scops.org.uk/forecasts/nematodirus-forecast/>