



Bluetongue update August 2026

WHAT ARE THE TRUE RISKS TO YOUR FLOCK OR HERD

Bluetongue virus (BTV) is an infectious, non-contagious, vector-borne viral disease that affects both wild and domestic ruminants, including sheep, goats, cattle, deer and camelids. The first case of BTV-3 in the UK was confirmed in England on 10 November 2023. The subsequent outbreak of bluetongue virus serotype 3 (BTV-3) in the Netherlands during 2023 resulted in severe clinical signs in affected ruminants. These appeared to be more severe than those observed during the BTV-8 outbreak between 2006 and 2008. Following a significant increase in cases during 2025, bluetongue has re-emerged as a major disease threat across parts of the UK, highlighting the importance of continued vigilance and robust biosecurity measures.

The latest update

In recent days, there has been a notable increase in confirmed BTV cases across the UK. Since 1 July 2026, 84 cases have been reported. To date no cases have been confirmed in Scotland or Northern Ireland. However, due to current laboratory testing delays of up to 14 days, the actual number of infections is expected to be considerably higher. Record numbers of cases are being reported across the South West, with daily confirmed case numbers continuing to rise.



The virus is transmitted by **biting midges**.



The current BTV outbreak in England and Wales is caused by **BTV-3**.



In highly susceptible sheep, **morbidity can be as high as 100%**. Mortality averages are **2-30%** but can be as high as **70%**.

TRANSMISSION

Vector-borne transmission:

- The main mode of transmission is through the bite of infected *Culicoides* midges.

Midge activity:

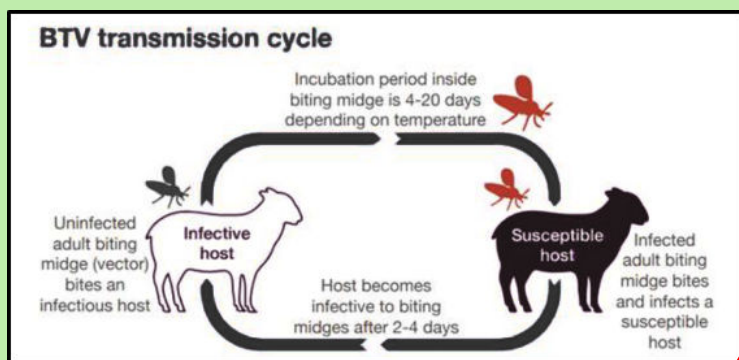
- Midges are most active during warmer months (April to November), which aligns with the period when bluetongue outbreaks are most common.

Animal movement:

- Movement of infected animals, including ruminants and camelids, and their germinal products (semen, ova, embryos) can spread the virus.

Mother-to-offspring transmission:

- BTV-3 can also be transmitted from a pregnant animal to its offspring



The notifiable disease affects cattle, sheep, and goats, and can also affect bison, buffalo, alpacas, llamas and deer.

THE SPREAD:

Requires a vector

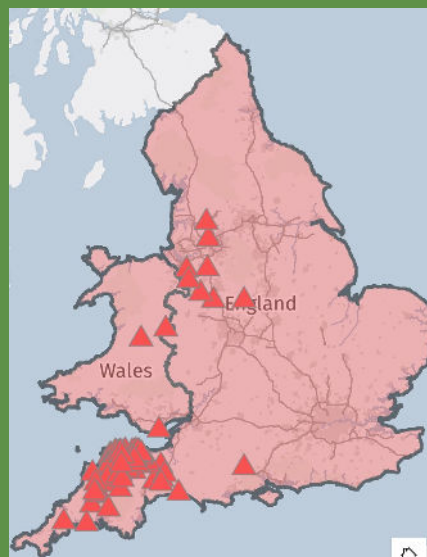
- Direct animal to animal spread not possible
- Main vector is *Culicoides* midge (*C. obsoletus* in UK)
- Requires constant temperature >12 deg C to allow transmission
- Midges advance 2 – 8km per day
- Wind plumes can accelerate spread in to new areas

Biosecurity

- Moving infected animals can move virus to new areas
- Moving infected midges can move virus to new areas
- Needles – blood contamination – if injecting groups of animals for any reason during bluetongue season, change needles frequently.
- Germplasm – definitely in semen, probably not in ova and embryos

CURRENT PICTURE

We are facing record cases across the South West. APHA veterinary head of outbreak delivery Sascha Van Helvoort said **humidity, high temperatures, wind speed and livestock density** were all factors in the spread of bluetongue.



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CLINICAL SIGNS:

SHEEP

- **Death**
- Fever
- Breathing Problems
- Discharge from eyes/ nose and mouth
- Swelling of lips/ tongues or coronary band
- Red Skin
- Abortions, foetal abnormalities and poor conception rates

COWS- GENERALLY:

- Abortions, foetal abnormalities and poor conception rates- dummy calves?
- Nasal Discharge
- Fever and Lethargy
- Teat Defects
- Redness around hooves and lameness
- Milk Drop



COWS- DAIRY

- Plus significant milk drop for up to 9 weeks (1kg per cow per day)
- In the Netherlands in 2023, there was a significant impact on the dairy sector, **1.15kg/cow/day drop in milk production** 100 cow herd ~8,000kg of milk during an outbreak period
- **Increase in high** and bulk **somatic cell counts**

COWS- SUCKLER

- Production is KEY- with or without clinical signs
- SUMMER- clinical signs
- AUTUMN- fertility issues
- WINTER- abortions and empty cows
- SPRING- empty cows, abortions, stillborn, deformities and poor viability, Blindness / Neurological

SEASONALITY:

- Seasonal disease due to seasonality of midge population
- It is therefore quite predictable and we are able to predict what is very likely to happen
- Vaccination will be most effective if given before the vector high period- you need 3 weeks from (last dose) vaccination to be protected
- Classical BTV generally comes in 3 – 4 year waves
- Wise to vaccinate during waves to reduce economic impact

FAQ's with the Vaccine:

How soon pre tupping shall I vaccinate?

So far there has been no recorded adverse affects to fertility with the use of Bultavo-3. Ideally with all vaccines we advise 6-8 weeks, as vaccinating stock could potentially spike body temperature that in turn would affect the quality of sperm. BUT if you have no option and in the face of an outbreak CVS QI team are suggesting that you are better to vaccinate than not at all - please speak to your individual vet and discuss on a case by case basis.

VACCINE:

Bultavo 3 most widely used

- Inactivated adjuvated vaccine
- Vaccination allowed under general licence (not NI currently)
- Records of sale and use must be reported to APHA by vet practice and owner
- Highly effective

Licensed to

SHEEP

- Active immunisation to reduce viraemia and prevent clinical signs and mortality caused by BTV3
- Single 1ml S/C dose 3 weeks from 1 month of age
- Lambs of vaccinated dams should not be vaccinated until 3 months

CATTLE

- Active immunisation against BTV3
- 2 x 1ml I/M doses administered 3 weeks apart
- Calves of vaccinated dams should not be vaccinated until 2.5 months

TREATMENT OPTIONS:

- NSAIDs injection – **CAN BE GIVEN ONCE ONLY**
- Supportive fluid therapy
- B vitamins
- Antibiotics for secondary infections
- Antihistamines tried in Europe but they found that actually it increased the death rate
- Long term complications- barren cattle, dummy calves (see clinical signs)
- Prompt euthanasia must be considered for the most severely infected animals on welfare grounds
- Only known treatment is to **PREVENT with Vaccination**



>15 million doses sold in Europe since May 2024, zero adverse reaction reports or reports of deaths in vaccinated animals.



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