

Press release

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Farmers urged to beware, take action and be vigilant for new strain of Bluetongue virus

Following reports of a new strain of bluetongue virus (BTV-3) emerging and spreading rapidly in the Netherlands, there is increasing concern about the situation and its proximity to the UK.

Ruminant Health and Welfare (RH&W) has facilitated emergency meetings this week, bringing together over 40 key stakeholders and representatives from across the industry, to ensure the four nations are prepared for this emerging disease threat.

“What we are advising is three-fold. Farmers need to beware when buying animals in, especially from Europe, take action to report any signs of the disease, and at all times, remain vigilant,” explains Dr Joseph Henry, president of the Sheep Veterinary Society and member of RH&W’s steering group.

BTV-3 is a viral disease transmitted by biting midges, which affects all ruminants (e.g. sheep, cattle, goats and deer) and camelids (e.g. llama and alpaca).

“The existing BTV-8 serotype vaccine will not offer cross-protection against this new BTV-3 strain, making any likely outbreak difficult to control. Hence why it’s so important that we follow the advice to take action and prioritise good biosecurity measures while remaining extremely vigilant to the disease at this stage.”

Dr Henry adds: “It remains extremely difficult to protect against midges and a vector borne disease. However, there is always a role for good biosecurity and insecticides, but it’s important to differentiate between products licensed for use on animals, and those designed for use on building and vehicles.”

Updating on the emerging threat, Cat Mclaughlin, NFU chief animal health and welfare advisor, and member of RH&W steering group, says: “As of early October, BTV-3 has been reported on more than 700 farms in the Netherlands.

“Just this week, a new case has been reported in Belgium, meaning BTV-3 is now in two European countries. BTV-3 appears to mimic BTV-8 in its behaviour, leading us to be extremely cautious to the risk it poses.

“Currently, there are no reports of the new strain in the UK. But it is felt that due to the nature of bluetongue’s ability to spread via infected midges, and current warm weather conditions, the risk of it reaching the UK is increasing, so we must adhere to advice and do all we can to keep it out,” she says.

Phil Stocker, NSA chief executive and member of RH&W steering group, adds that bluetongue does not pose a threat to human health, but it remains a notifiable disease.

“We’d strongly advise farmers to beware when buying livestock from Europe, and to request pre-movement testing of animals prior to departure,” he says.

“All imports of live animals are subject to post-import testing with restricted movements until a negative post-import test result has been confirmed, so caution is key.”

Symptoms of BTV-3 can vary across ruminants, with sheep generally exhibiting more overt symptoms than cattle, but both can showcase clinical signs.

These include in sheep; drooling, mouth lesions, high fever, lameness and oedema (swollen heads) and sudden death. Cattle are not usually as severely affected but may show similar clinical signs as well as teat, eye, coronary band and nose lesions.

RH&W’s advice to farmers and their vets remains three-fold, farmers need to **beware** when buying animals in, **take action** to report any signs, and always, remain **vigilant**:

1. **B**uyer beware, only source animals from Europe responsibly.
2. **T**ake action, prioritise biosecurity and report any suspicious clinical signs.
3. **V**igilance is key, monitor livestock closely.

In the UK, bluetongue, including BTV-3, is a notifiable disease, so anyone suspecting the disease must take action and [report it](#) to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).

Further information and resources can be found here:

<https://ruminanthw.org.uk/bluetongue-virus/>

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Editor’s notes

Ruminant Health & Welfare was established to co-ordinate and focus the ruminant sector’s drive in tackling endemic cattle, sheep and goat diseases across the UK, working with partners in the four nations.

We work with industry and governments to influence collective action and secure the policy framework and funding required to prevent, manage or control disease and welfare challenges across the ruminant sectors.

Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland already have protocols in place for many diseases, so Ruminant Health & Welfare’s role in these countries will be to assist existing bodies to deliver these priorities and share best practice.



Members comprise of key stakeholders as well as specialist expertise in ruminant disease, genetics and epidemiology. For more information visit www.ruminanthw.org.uk and sign up to our [newsletter](#) or follow us on Twitter @ruminanthw.