

Accurate as of Tuesday 15th October 2024

Defra page with guidance, current situation, details on the restricted zone, and who to report suspected cases to can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/bluetongue-information-and-guidance-for-livestock-keepers#spot-and-report-it>

APHA map of restricted zones can be found here:

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=514ec88edec74575958d860f0196d2ea>

What is Bluetongue virus?

- BTV is a disease which spreads primarily via an insect host (midges) between susceptible species (ruminants and camelids), but may spread via germinal products, and to a foetus of an infected, pregnant animal
- It does **not** infect humans and does not pose a food safety risk
- BTV3 is believed to have arrived in the UK via infected midges blown across from Europe, with the first case recorded in November '23
- There are several strains of BTV, most have vaccines which are effective against them. BTV-3, the strain currently circulating in Europe and present in the UK, has three vaccines which can be used under [licence](#) in affected areas, in discussion with a veterinary surgeon. The vaccinations for the BTV3 strain appear to reduce clinical signs and mortality, rather than preventing infection.
- It is **notifiable** in the UK. This means anyone who suspects an animal of having the disease is legally obliged to report it by calling the Defra Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301. In Wales, contact 0300 303 8268. In Scotland, contact your local [Field Services Office](#).

Current Situation:

- Bluetongue Virus (BTV-3), a notifiable disease, has been detected in over 130 animals, across several counties; predominantly in Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk.
- A [restricted zone](#) (RZ), preventing movement of ruminants and camelids out of this area, now covers Bedfordshire, part of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, City of Kingston upon Hull, East Riding of Yorkshire, East Sussex, Essex, Greater London, Hampshire (part), Hertfordshire, Kent, Leicestershire (part), Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire (part), Nottinghamshire, Suffolk, Surrey and West Sussex.
- Some isolated cases have been detected outside of the RZ, due to animal movements prior to the RZ being put in place
- [Free testing](#) for BTV3 is available in RZ's, and [vaccinations are available](#) which may reduce clinical symptoms and/or mortality (though not preventing infection). Vaccinated animals are still subject to the movement restrictions in place in RZ's
- Animals outside of the restricted zone diagnosed with BTV3 are generally euthanised to prevent ongoing spread (via midges), while affected animals in RZ's are recommended to be treated for the associated pain of the disease.
- We recommend monitoring the linked websites regularly, to comply with any extension of the RZ, or change in guidance on animal movements

Symptoms of BTV:

- BTV can be asymptomatic (the infected animals have no symptoms), or they may be asymptomatic for many weeks before showing signs of infection.
- Symptoms of BTV can look very like Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD - a highly contagious animal disease which often results in the need for mass culling). It is thus extremely important any animals exhibiting these symptoms are tested to rule out FMD.

In sheep (more likely to display clinical signs than cattle):

- ulcers or sores in the mouth and nose
- discharge from the eyes or nose and drooling from 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)

Less commonly/more "vague" symptoms include:

- red skin as a result of blood collecting beneath the surface
- fever
- lameness
- breathing problems
- abortion
- death

In cattle (NB adult cattle can be infectious but asymptomatic for many weeks):

- lethargy
- crusty erosions around the nostrils and muzzle
- redness of the mouth, eyes, nose
- reddening of the skin above the hoof
- nasal discharge
- reddening and erosions on the teats
- fever
- milk drop
- not eating
- abortion

In calves:

- born small, weak, deformed or blind
- death within a few days of birth

In goats, camelids and deer symptoms are similar to cattle, and again the animals can be asymptomatic for many weeks. Known clinical cases in camelids are rare but where they have been seen onset of symptoms is sudden with often fatal results, with excessive foaming at the nose and mouth, camelids being recumbent and off food.

What does this mean for vets?

- Remain vigilant when going out to see, or caring for, susceptible species (sheep, cattle, goats, deer and camelids)
- Report suspicious symptoms in susceptible species
 - This is done by calling the Defra Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301. In Wales, contact 0300 303 8268. In Scotland, contact your local [Field Services Office](#).
- Continue to practise good biosecurity when visiting animal facilities, handling or transporting animals
- If holding susceptible species, continue to monitor the situation to ensure you are not within a restricted zone
- Any movement of susceptible animals in a restricted zone must be carried out within the requirements of these zones. Other species such as pigs and poultry, are not impacted by these movement restrictions