

Bluetongue

How to spot the disease

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SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE



What is bluetongue?

Bluetongue disease is caused by a virus that is transmitted by midges. Bluetongue virus naturally infects domestic and wild ruminants (for example, sheep, cattle, goats and deer) and camelids (for example, llama and alpaca). Sheep are most severely affected by bluetongue. Cattle, although infected more frequently than sheep, do not always show signs of disease.

Bluetongue does not affect humans so there are no human or public health implications.

Although impact varies between strains (serotypes), bluetongue can have significant economic impacts in terms of on farm losses due to death, sickness and reduced productivity, and losses to export revenue as live exports are banned from affected areas.

This leaflet provides some facts on the disease, and advice on what you should do if you suspect your animals have the disease.

How is bluetongue transmitted?

Bluetongue virus cannot naturally be transmitted directly between animals. Virus transmission between animals occurs via the midges of culicoides species. However, the likelihood of mechanical transmission of the virus between herds/flocks and within a herd/flock by unhygienic practices (e.g. use of contaminated surgical equipment or hypodermic needles) cannot be excluded.

Bluetongue outbreak in Northern Europe in 2006

In the autumn of 2006, bluetongue was found in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Western Germany and in parts of North Eastern France. The virus was identified as a new type (BTV-8) in the EU. It is a strain of BTV-8 that was last found in sub-Saharan Africa and is distinct from American, Asian or vaccine strains of BTV-8. It is a different serotype to those causing bluetongue infections in Southern Europe.

An important difference observed in the 2006 outbreak in Northern Europe is that cattle have become clinically affected and a proportion have died of the disease. It has been observed that native midges common to Northern Europe (and the UK) are spreading the disease.





Risk to the UK

Now that the disease is present in Northern Europe, there is an increased risk that it could enter the UK. There are two main routes by which bluetongue could enter the UK.

Animal imports

Imports of susceptible live animals to the UK from restricted areas in the EU are prohibited. As a precautionary measure post-import testing is being carried out on all susceptible species imported from the continental EU Member States.

Windborne spread

Prevailing winds can potentially spread infected midges from affected areas in Europe to the UK.



Clinical signs in sheep:

- Eye and nasal discharges which becomes thick and crusty.
- Drooling as a result of ulcerations in the mouth.
- High body temperature.
- Swelling of the mouth, head and neck.
- Lameness with wasting of the muscles of the hind limb.
- Haemorrhages into or under the skin.
- Inflammation at the junction of the skin and the horn of the foot – the coronary band.
- Respiratory problems – difficulty with breathing and nasal discharge.
- A blue tongue is rarely a clinical sign of infection.
- Fever.
- Tiredness.





Clinical signs in cattle:

It is possible that cattle will show no signs of illness, however clinical signs have included:

- Nasal discharge.
- Swelling of the head and neck.
- Conjunctivitis (red and runny eyes).
- Swelling inside and ulceration of the mouth.
- Swollen teats.
- Tiredness.
- Saliva drooling out of the mouth.
- Fever.

What can I do?

Monitor your stock carefully

- If you suspect one of your animals has bluetongue, you must report it as quickly as possible. Telephone your local Animal Health Office immediately. To find out the telephone number of your local office, call the Defra helpline on 08459 335577, or visit the Defra website at **www.defra.gov.uk**
- If you are concerned that your animal(s) are unwell, you should inspect your stock closely, particularly focusing on the lining of the mouth and nose and the coronary band (where the hoof stops and the skin starts).
- Your local farm animal veterinary surgeon can provide help in the diagnosis of bluetongue and in differentiating it from others diseases.





For telephone and email enquiries for information on any aspect of Defra's work, the Defra Helpline can be contacted on **08459 33 55 77**.

The Helpline number is a local call rate number within the UK and is available between 9am and 5pm on working days.

From outside the UK the telephone number is **+44 (0) 20 7238 6951**.

There is also a minicom/textphone number for the deaf and hard of hearing: **0845 300 1998**.

The Helpline email address is **helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk**

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