Precautionary guidance on handling and storage of Schmallenberg Virus

Following recent reports of cases of livestock (sheep, cattle) which may have been infected with the Schmallenberg virus, we are writing to all laboratories in England licensed to work with specified animal pathogens to guide you, on a precautionary basis, on the containment of this virus.

Although there is insufficient evidence at the moment to determine whether the Schmallenberg virus should be listed as a specified animal pathogen, our advice is that if you are working or are considering working, or are storing this virus, or materials that are likely to contain it, in a laboratory, that you treat it as a Category 2 animal pathogen. Any laboratory that is licensed under SAPO will already be operating at Category 2 as a minimum, and many of the conditions required are consistent with good laboratory practice. Work with the virus in potential vector species should likewise be undertaken at Category 2, paying particular attention to these requirements with respect to preventing the entry or escape of insects.

Our advice is also that laboratories should avoid working with this agent in livestock species at this time, except in facilities working at Category 3.

The Defra web pages at http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/diseases/pathogens/category2.htm and http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/diseases/pathogens/category3.htm set out the containment requirements and conditions for these levels. Of particular importance are the waste disposal requirements, and insect protection (preventing both escape and gaining entry) as the virus is highly likely to be spread by midges or other biting insects.

Further information on the virus can be found at http://www.defra.gov.uk/animal-diseases/a-z/schmallenberg-virus/.

If you have any questions please contact us through the Pathogens mailbox at pathogens@defra.gsi.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely
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