

Updated Situation Assessment No.18

Bluetongue virus (BTV-8) in France

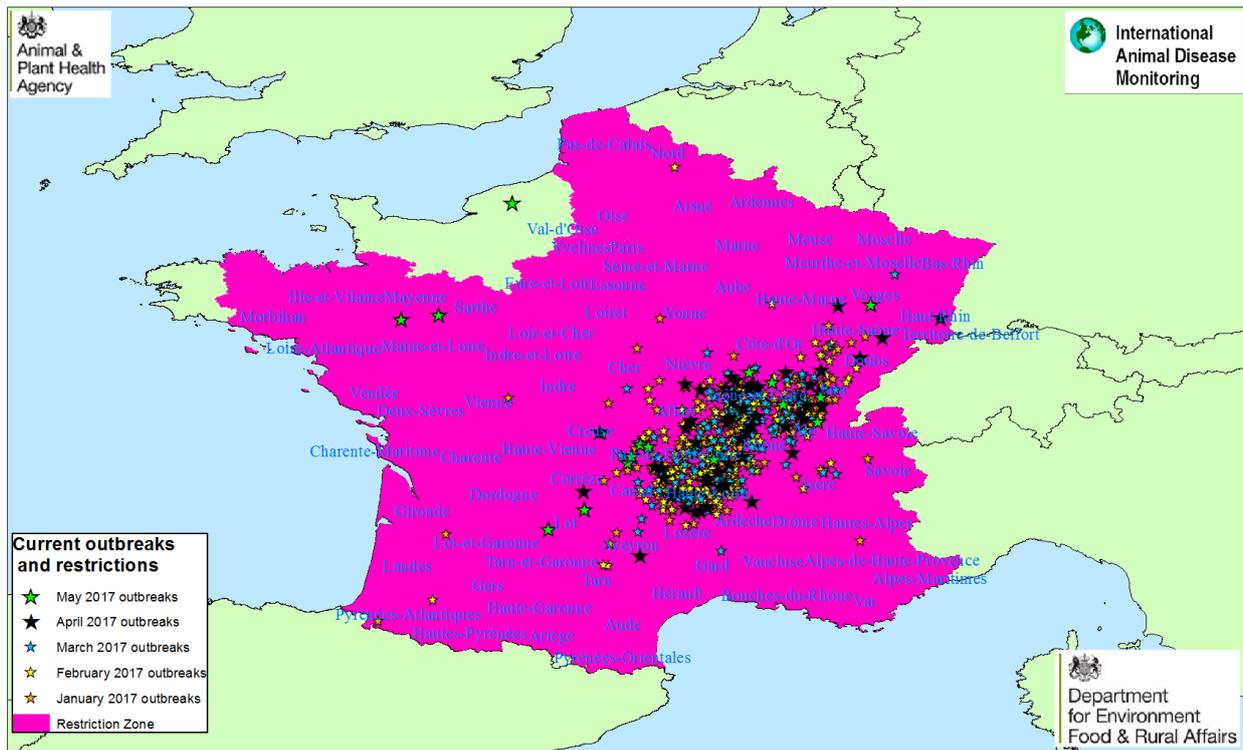
25 May 2017

Ref: VITT/1200 BTV-8 in France

Disease report

France has reported over 650 new BTV-8 positive animals in 2017. The majority of these are a result of pre-movement testing which is in place, and the sentinel surveillance in cattle in the areas under disease restriction. Since our last update on the 10th of April, BTV has been detected in the Seine Maritime département and we wait to see if the restriction zone will be increased to include all or parts of the départements of Seine Maritime, Eure, Orne and Calvados. The nearest positive results were reported from a holding within 150 km of the UK mainland, although we are still awaiting confirmation that the cattle are infectious.

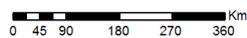
We have considered the scientific evidence and veterinary advice and concluded that the UK will apply for a derogation from Article 8 of the Directive (2000/75/EEC) such that no restriction zone will be necessary for the edge of the likely French 150 km radius Surveillance Zone that would extend over small parts of the Sussex and Kent coastal land..



Map Prepared by IDM
Absolute Scale 1:7,400,000

BTV-8 in France: outbreaks detected since January 2017 and current Restriction Zones* by date of map

Date prepared 25/05/2017



* restriction zones are available on the French Min of Ag website
<http://agriculture.gouv.fr/liste-des-departements-et-des-communes-classes-en-zone-reglementee-fo>

Situation assessment

According to the ADNS report, the holding in Seine Maritime consists of a herd of 261 cattle of which two tested positive, although only 60 would have been tested as part of sentinel surveillance. No clinical signs were reported but the national reference laboratory has confirmed the animals had also seroconverted, which would indicate the animals were infected earlier in the year, but whether they are still infectious will depend on the level of viraemia, which is not known.

The Bluetongue Directive (2000/75/EC), Article 8 requires Member States to cooperate when zones extend beyond the limits of a single Member State. However, a request may be made by the neighbouring State to derogate from defining the edge of any French restriction zone, in light of geographical location, ecological and meteorological conditions, vector presence, an epidemiological survey, results of lab tests and other controls measures.

In terms of these factors, the scientific evidence suggests that:

- Only one report has been made in this northern region of France, and there is no reported evidence from French authorities that BTV-8 is circulating in local midge populations or spreading to other animals and therefore it seems that it is not widely circulating in the area of Northern France;

- The climate and environment in southern England are suitable to support a low level of virus circulation, as seen in the last historical BTV-8 circulation in the UK in 2007;
- The vector season has now started with average daily temperatures well above 12°C and therefore virus transmission can occur;
- Records of wind direction and humidity and temperature factors suggest that on only one of the last ten days would conditions have been suitable for wind assisted spread of *Culicoides* midges from northern France to England;
- Testing of animals in South and South East England in 2016 demonstrated a significant proportion of cattle herds had some level of antibody response using a bulk milk test, which could be indicative of vaccination status or previous (historical) infection, dating back several years;
- Our disease modelling has shown that even in a warm spring, only a few midge incursions will cause active infections and this will depend on the proportion of non-vaccinated animals in England, the level of infection in France, average daily temperatures and vector activity.
- A census of the animal population demographic in the relevant coastal area of Sussex and Kent suggests this is a relatively low density area, with fewer than 200 cattle herds of which only 14 would be considered large dairy herds (> 200 animals) and around 300 sheep flocks of which 38 have more than 150 sheep and 14 have more than 500 sheep. Cattle tend to be more attractive to the *Culicoides obsoletus* complex of midges than sheep, and the larger the herd size, the higher the risk of infection being introduced.
- Although vaccination has not been mandatory in the UK in the past few years, vaccine has been made available to farmers since July 2016.
- Our methods of detecting an incursion include horizon scanning, a passive surveillance system, a post import testing regime and an opportunistic surveillance system which gives us a good level of confidence that disease is not currently circulating in the UK.
- We also have the industry –led Joint Action against Bluetongue (JAB) campaign, which raises awareness with farmers and vets about reporting and vaccination.

According to our meteorological modelling the current temperatures, humidity and wind direction mean the probability of incursion of BTV via infected midges from France to the UK is low. This single case in northern France does not change the risk level. As mentioned above, it is unclear at present whether the new reported positive tests in north France are due to sentinel animals testing positive for the first time.

Conclusion

The risk of BTV incursion into UK population remains at **LOW** to reflect the onset of the vector season, the wind direction and low levels of infection in northern France. However this may change as the weather changes and if more infected animals are detected in the northern France.

We will continue to monitor the current situation in France and disseminate any further updates from the French Authorities, particularly with regards to the most recent cases.

BTV-8 vaccine has been available for the GB market since mid-July 2016, and the decision to vaccinate will be taken by the farmer, which the GB authorities have encouraged all of them to consider, in consultation with their private veterinary surgeon.

For information on bluetongue and the vaccine availability in GB, see the latest materials recently posted on line by the National Farmer's Union (NFU) at www.nfuonline.com/bluetongue and the latest information to encourage BTV vaccination by the Joint Action against Bluetongue (JAB) campaign.

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