

# Bluetongue

Guidance for livestock keepers

[www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)



This publication is out of date and has been withdrawn



# 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), outbreaks of all bluetongue serotypes can have significant economic impacts in terms of on farm losses due to death, sickness and reduced productivity, and movement restrictions.

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 almost exclusively 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. For more information on protecting your livestock against midges

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/bluetongue/farmers/>

## Imports of susceptible livestock

All involved in the import and movement of bluetongue susceptible species should consider carefully the risks and check the health status of animals when sourcing animals from within the UK and from abroad.





## 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 neck and head, especially around the eyes and muzzle.
- Conjunctivitis (red and runny eyes).
- Swelling inside and ulceration of the mouth.
- Swollen and/or reddened teats and vulva.
- Tiredness.
- Lameness.
- Saliva drooling out of the mouth.
- Fever.
- Potential for long-term production losses in recovered animals, e.g. reduced milk yield.

The disease cannot always be diagnosed on clinical grounds, testing is required for disease confirmation.



### **Clinical signs in sheep:**

- Eye and nasal discharges which becomes thick and crusty.
- Drooling as a result of swelling and/or ulcerations in the mouth.
- Higher than normal body temperature.
- Swelling of the neck and/or the face, especially around the eyes and the muzzle.
- Severe lameness affected sheep are reluctant to rise.
- Haemorrhages into or under the skin.
- Inflammation and pain at the junction of the skin and the horn of the foot – the coronary band.
- Respiratory problems – difficulty breathing.
- A “blue tongue” is rarely a clinical sign of infection.
- Sheep are apparently sick, look tired and lethargic.
- Production losses may be prolonged and include infertility (especially in males) and reduced lambing percentages.

Flock mortality may reach as high as 70 per cent, those that survive may lose condition and experience reduced wool and meat production.





## Vaccination

Vaccination is the only effective tool to protect susceptible animals from bluetongue. Vaccine for bluetongue (serotype 8) is available, livestock keepers should order BTV 8 vaccine through their vet as they would other veterinary medicines.

Vaccination will:

- Allow keepers to protect their animals from bluetongue.
- Reduce the economic and welfare impact of bluetongue.
- Facilitate the movement of vaccinated animals out of Restricted Zones.

Livestock keepers should not become complacent, Bluetongue serotype 8 is still circulating in mainland Europe. Animals should be vaccinated as early as possible each year, particularly before the onset of warm weather, when the risk of infection increases.

## What can I do?

### Monitor your stock carefully

We strongly encourage all livestock farmers to remain vigilant and report any clinical signs of disease. Your local vet can provide help in the diagnosis but if you suspect bluetongue you must report it immediately to your local Animal Health office. To find their telephone number, call the Defra Helpline on 08459 335577, or visit the Animal Health website

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalhealth/>

### Vaccinate

Vaccination is the only effective tool to protect susceptible animals from bluetongue.

### Source animals responsibly

All involved in the import and movement of bluetongue susceptible species should consider carefully the risks and check the health status of animals when sourcing animals from within the UK and from abroad.





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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