Animal & Plant Health Agency

SRUC

Great Britain small ruminant quarterly report, disease surveillance and emerging threats

Volume 29: Quarter 1 – January to March 2026

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Introduction and overview

This quarterly report reviews disease trends and threats for the first quarter of 2026 (Q1), January to March. It contains interesting cases and analyses carried out on disease data gathered from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), SRUC Veterinary Services division of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), and Surveillance Pathology Partners; and intelligence gathered through the Small Ruminant Expert Group networks. In addition, links to other sources of information, including reports from other parts of the APHA and Defra agencies, are included. A full explanation of how data is analysed is provided in the annexe available on GOV.UK. This report is based on the data as available at the time of writing and analysis and trends based on later updated data may therefore differ from this report.

APHA's Emerging and Endemic Disease Alert System (EEDAS)

This is a component of the communications from our scanning surveillance network and a system that the APHA uses to keep you up to date with significant disease alerts and information, projects, publication of reports and other items. This is independent of the notifiable disease alert system.

To receive these notifications please respond to siu@apha.gov.uk, providing your preferred:

- email address you would like us to use
- mobile telephone number if you wish to receive text alerts

We hope that you find this EEDAS messaging system to be beneficial, and any suggestions or feedback are welcome.

Issues and trends

Weather

Details can be found at the Met Office climate summaries and the Met Office UK temperature, rainfall and sunshine anomaly graphs.

Lamb sector update

Prices: Q1 2026 Great Britain (GB) deadweight prices continued to grow strongly, with the average old season deadweight Standard Quality Quotation (SQQ) price up to 863 pence per kilogram (p/kg) the week ending 28 March. This price was up 150p/kg from the week ending 3 January 2026, up 140p/kg on the year.

Production: Q1 clean sheep slaughter rose 5% from the same period in the previous year to 2.9 million head. Carcase weights also rose, boosted by cheaper feed and high prices, up 0.5kg year on year to 21.1kg. As a result, sheep meat production was up 8% to 70,000 tonnes. Adult sheep slaughter was up 1% to 322,000 head for Q1 compared to the same time frame the year previous.

Trade: Imports of sheep meat (fresh, frozen, processed and offal) to the UK remained consistent in Q1, up just 0.6% on the year to total 19,200 tonnes. New Zealand remains the largest supplier, but their quantity supplied was down 9%, while Australia's quantity supplied was up 32%. Total UK sheep meat exports for Q1 of 2026 totalled 26,800 tonnes, up 19% of the same period year on year. The value of these exports rose 24% driven by strong demand in France and Germany.

Demand: Lamb sales in retail over Q1 saw a 1.7% decline in volume, while spend was up 9.2% year-on-year. This was driven by a 1.9% decrease in primary cuts during the 12-week period. Roasting legs saw a 4.9% volume increase during Q1, driven an increase in shoppers during the period (Worldpanel by Numerator, 12 weeks ending 22 March 2026).

Acknowledgment for the lamb sector update: Molly Corbett, AHDB.

Bluetongue

The 2025 to 2026 vector season started on the 1 July 2025. Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of confirmed bluetongue (BTV) cases between 1 July 2025 and 17 April 2026. These interactive maps can be found here: Bluetongue Cases and Zones.

During Q1 2026 most confirmed cases were in cattle. Further detail on these cases can be found on this webinar: Bluetongue virus webinar - 13 May - Ruminant Health & Welfare

Images of the clinical signs can be found here: Clinical signs of bluetongue | AHDB

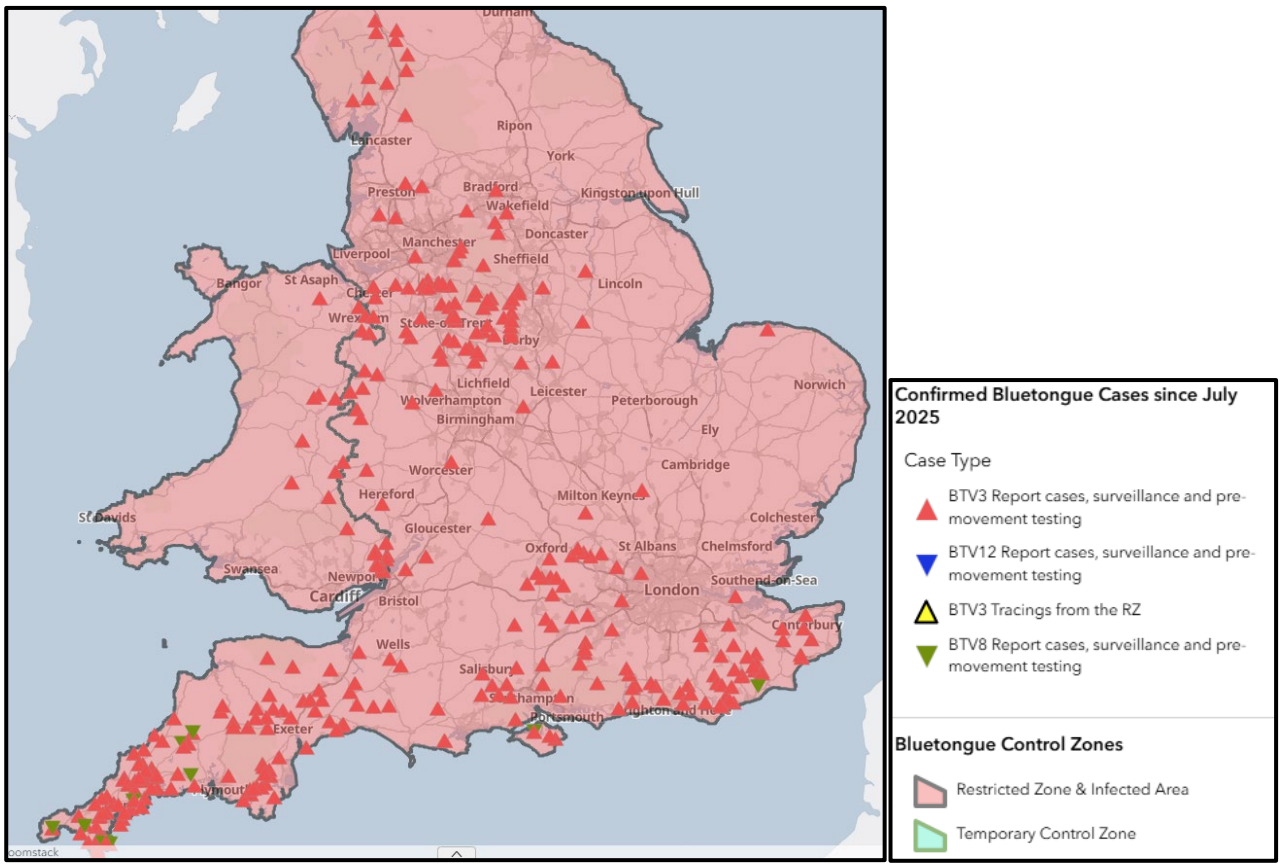

Figure 1: Map of England and Wales showing the confirmed bluetongue cases between 1 July 2025 and 17th April 2026

Bluetongue virus is a notifiable disease. Suspicion of bluetongue virus in animals must be reported to the Animal and Plant Health Agency on 03000 200 301 in England, on 03003 038 268 in Wales, and to the local Field Services Office in Scotland. Further guidance and information are available on the Ruminant Health & Welfare site, Bluetongue: information and guidance for livestock keepers (GOV.UK) and on Bluetongue: how to spot and report it (GOV.UK).

Unusual diagnoses

Yersiniosis in a pygmy goat

A one-year-old homebred pygmy goat was observed lying down frequently in the 2 days before being found dead. The goat tended to segregate herself from the herd of 26, which were housed at night and given paddock access during the day, and were supplementary fed with barley straw, hay and concentrates. The goat had kidded 2 months previously. The group was not recently wormed and was due for a clostridial booster vaccine at the time of submission. No recent worm egg monitoring had been conducted. The carcase was pale and petechiae were noted throughout the liver and lungs. The abomasal mucosa

had raised areas however, more marked pathology was noted in the intestines. Parts of the jejunal wall were grossly thickened with flaking of cream to yellow mucosal tissue and mucoid contents (Figure 2). More distally, discrete yellow diphtheritic plaques were seen in the caecum. *Yersinia pseudotuberculosis* was isolated from the liver and lungs, and histopathological examination confirmed an acute suppurative hepatitis and oedematous, erosive enterocolitis with bacterial colonies. There was no significant worm burden.

Y. pseudotuberculosis is a Gram-negative bacillus that is common in the environment, and a common inhabitant of the gastrointestinal tract of several bird and mammal species. It is a facultative anaerobe that thrives in cool, wet or waterlogged, low-oxygen environmental conditions. If present, these environmental conditions allow *Y. pseudotuberculosis* to multiply to high levels. In conjunction with impaired host immune responses, such as stress, endoparasitism, and sudden feed changes, these combined risk factors are likely prerequisites for disease to occur. Cases of *Y. pseudotuberculosis* in cattle have increased over the last two winters: GB cattle quarterly report - Disease surveillance and emerging threats (page 8). Outbreaks can also be seen in growing farmed deer, due to stressors such as weaning, a change in feed, or extreme weather. *Yersinia* spp. has zoonotic potential, albeit this is very rare.

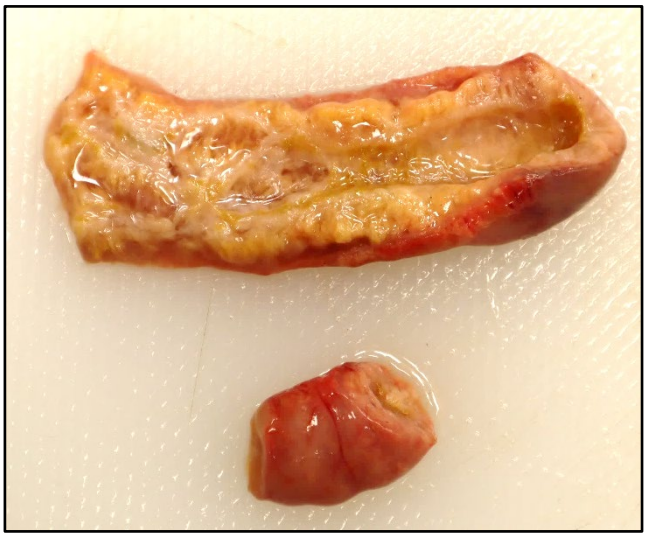

Figure 2. Severe oedematous and erosive enterocolitis due to *Yersinia pseudotuberculosis* infection in a goat

Campylobacter fetus fetus, hypogammaglobulinaemia, and colisepticaemia in a neonatal lamb

A 2-day-old lamb was euthanised and submitted to Starcross Veterinary Investigation Centre to investigate weakly-born lambs and neonatal lamb deaths, in a flock of 500 ewes. Five deaths had been reported. At postmortem examination, circumscribed ‘smoke-ring’ lesions measuring 4-5mm diameter were seen on the liver (Figure 3), resembling those seen in *Campylobacter* abortions. The contents of the small intestine were very watery, and the contents of the large intestine were minimal and red tinged.

Bacterial cultures isolated *E. coli* in purity from systemic sites, confirming a colisepticaemia, and *Campylobacter fetus fetus* was isolated from the liver, an unusual finding in this age of animal. It was unknown whether *Campylobacter* abortions had been reported in the flock. The *Campylobacter* infection was likely acquired in utero and resulted in the birth of a weakened lamb, which then succumbed to colisepticaemia. Zinc sulphate turbidity (ZST) testing revealed concurrent hypogammaglobulinaemia which was likely a significant predisposing factor.

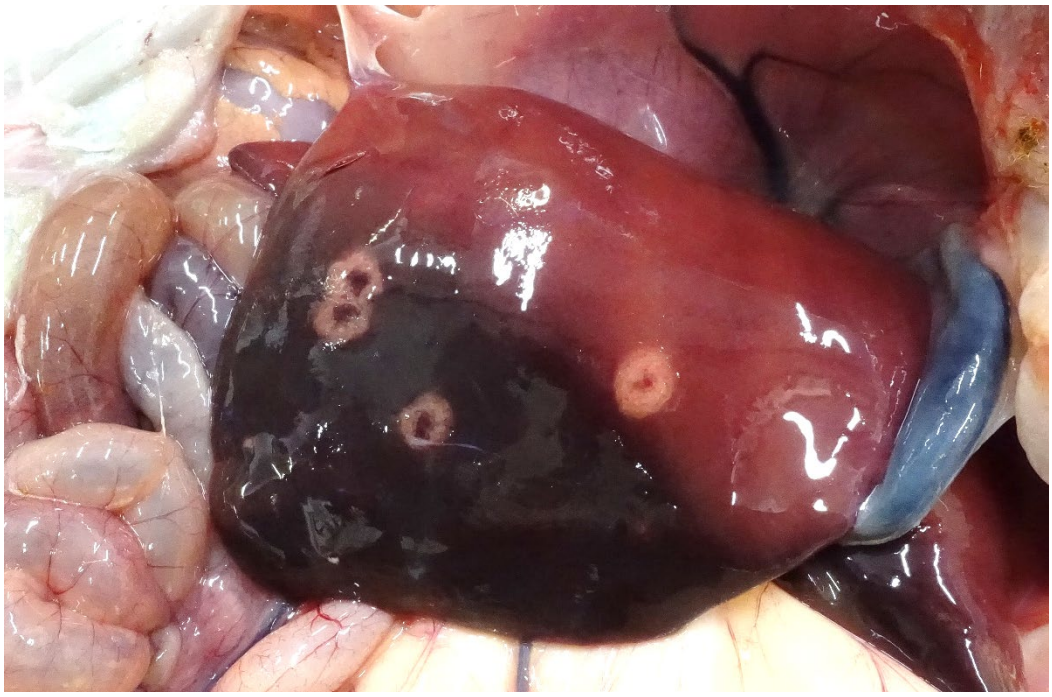

Figure 3. Circumscribed "smoke-ring" lesions in the liver of a two-day-old lamb associated with *Campylobacter fetus fetus* infection

Goat disease surveillance dashboard outputs

The most frequent diagnoses from goat submissions made in Q1 of 2026, compared to Q1 in 2025, and Q1 for 2017 to 2026 inclusive, through the Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland) scanning surveillance network, are illustrated in Table 1. These can be interrogated further using the interactive small ruminant disease surveillance dashboard.

Table 1: Great Britain scanning surveillance five most frequent goat submission diagnoses in quarter 1 (Q1) of 2026, Q1 of 2025 and Q1 for 2017 to 2026

	5 most frequent diagnoses Q1 2026	5 most frequent diagnoses Q1 2025	5 most frequent diagnoses Q1 2017 to 2026
1	**Johne's disease**	Parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE)	Parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE)
2	**Parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE)**	*Clostridium perfringens* type D disease	Johne's disease
3	**Not listed - urinary**	Johne's disease	*Clostridium perfringens* type D disease
4	**Coccidiosis**	Hypocupraemia/Hypocuprosis	Listeriosis (encephalitis)
5	**Lice**	Coccidiosis	Hypocupraemia or hypocuprosis

Parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE) excludes PGE due to Haemonchus and PGE due to Nematodirus.

Not listed – urinary include developmental abnormalities such as renal dysplasia.

Sheep disease surveillance dashboard outputs

The most frequent diagnoses from sheep submissions made in Q1 of 2026, compared to Q1 in 2025, and Q1 for 2017 to 2026 inclusive, through the Great Britain (England, Wales, and Scotland) scanning surveillance network, are illustrated in Table 2. These can be interrogated further using the interactive small ruminant disease surveillance dashboard

Table 2: Great Britain scanning surveillance 10 most frequent sheep submission diagnoses in Q1 of 2026, Q1 of 2025, and Q1 for 2017 to 2026
(Data analysed on 8-5-26)

	10 most frequent diagnoses Q1 2026	10 most frequent diagnoses Q1 2025	10 most frequent diagnoses Q1 2017 to 2026
1	**Enzootic abortion**	Parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE)	Enzootic abortion
2	**Campylobacter abortion**	Enzootic abortion	Parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE)
3	**Parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE)**	Campylobacter abortion	Campylobacter abortion
4	**Hyposelenaemia**	Toxoplasma abortion	Toxoplasma abortion
5	**Toxoplasma abortion**	Schmallenberg abortion	Chronic fasciolosis
6	**Abortion – not listed**	Pneumonia due to *M. haemolytica*	Schmallenberg abortion
7	**Listeriosis (encephalitis)**	Chronic fasciolosis	Abortion – not listed
8	**Pneumonia due to *M. haemolytica***	Listeriosis (encephalitis)	Sheep scab
9	**OPA (Jaagsiekte)**	Abortion – not listed	Pneumonia due to *M. haemolytica*
10	**Chronic fascioliasis**	OPA (Jaagsiekte)	OPA (Jaagsiekte)

Parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE) excludes PGE due to Haemonchus and PGE due to Nematodirus.

Abortion – not listed include other bacterial infections such as *E. coli, Streptococcus uberis* and *Staphylococcus aureus.*

Changes in disease patterns and risk factors

Syndromic analysis for sheep

Syndromic alerts were raised this quarter, in comparison to the quarter average of the previous 5 years, for the following diseases:

APHA data only:

- *Bibersteinia trehalosi* septicaemia – increase
- Coccidiosis - increase

SRUC data only:

- Drenching gun / bolus injury – increase
- Hyposelenaemia / hyposelenosis – increase

Parasitology

Goats

Chronic PGE in a pygmy goat

A 10-month-old female Pygmy goat was submitted for postmortem examination (PME) to investigate the cause of death. The submitted goat had chronic diarrhoea and had always been in a poor body condition since purchase. A few days prior to submission, the faecal worm egg count of the submitted goat was 3000 epg and it was treated with Monepantel the following day.

Poor body condition and enteritis were the main findings on PME. No significant worm burden was detected from the abomasum, small intestine or faecal sample although it was highly likely that recent treatment had affected the result. A high coccidial egg count was detected with 22% of the coccidial oocysts being pathogenic. Most cases of coccidiosis will occur in kids aged 3 – 8 weeks, but clinical cases can on rare occasions develop in older kids and adults.

Following PME and taking in consideration the history, chronic PGE was suspected as being the cause of death in this goat. Histological examination of the intestines and abomasum was hindered by autolysis, although was supportive of this diagnosis. There was no definitive evidence of coccidiosis causing disease in this animal, but again, autolysis hampered detail examination of the fixed tissue.

PGE in adult goats

A 2-year-old male entire Boer-cross goat was submitted to investigate death following a 7–10-day period of inappetence and deterioration. A total of 10 from 31 had been affected and all had died.

At PME the animal was in poor condition and had a large volume of watery, pale liquid contents throughout the entire intestines. A very high burden of *Trichostrongylus* worms (22,600 worms detected by total worm count on gastrointestinal tract washings), with a moderate burden of *T. axei* worms and light numbers of other mixed species, was detected alongside a high number of trichostrongyle type eggs (700 epg) in the faeces. Given the watery, liquid presentation of this sample, it seems likely there would be a dilution effect on the number of eggs seen.

An update from the private veterinary surgeon reported that animals that had been treated with an anthelmintic had improved, and had become less 'potbellied' in appearance, further adding support to suggest endoparasitism was the primary problem.

Sheep

Parasitic gastroenteritis

Haemonchosis

Enhanced surveillance for *Haemonchus* sp., through discounted *Haemonchus* sp. differential fluorescent staining of eggs in faeces, continued this quarter.

Two cases were confirmed by VIC Penrith as early as January in 2025. The first cases of this year's season (2026) were confirmed by VIC Bury St Edmunds in February. Two ewes from a small MV-accredited pedigree flock were found dead over subsequent days. They had been vaccinated against clostridial disease, had received anthelmintic treatment in late summer, and had lambed in December 2025. Both were submitted for examination. One ewe had roughening of the abomasal mucosa, and both had moderate volumes of pericardial and pleural fluid with fibrin stranding, and consolidated pneumonia. Lung swabs did not isolate a significant respiratory pathogen. Worm egg and total worm counting identified a significant worm burden of 3,550 and 1,600 Trichostrongyle-type eggs per gram of faeces respectively, and a mixed burden of adult *Haemonchus* spp., *Trichostrongylus axei* and *Teladorsagia or Ostertagia* in the abomasum. Effusions seen in the pericardium and pleura were consistent with clinical haemonchosis, which also tends to not result in diarrhoea. Acquired immunity is poor, so adults, as well as young sheep, goats, and camelids are susceptible to infection, which is often characterised by high worm egg counts (1000s). February was typically considered early in the season for *Haemonchus* spp. as worms are more suited to tropical environments; however, there is evidence of overwintering on pasture. More likely, re-emergence of hypobiotic larvae within the abomasal wall resulted in clinical disease.

Keepers should remain vigilant for haemonchosis, utilising tools such as mucous membrane scoring (FAMACHA), especially in camelids, who may not show clinical signs until there is a marked anaemia.

Coccidiosis

The seasonal distribution of coccidiosis, as shown in figure 4, overlaps with Nematodirus cases that occur over the same months. Lambs affected by coccidiosis may therefore erroneously be assumed to suffer from Nematodirus and receive incorrect treatment. Following a spate of cases diagnosed by APHA VICs in March an EEDAS alert was issued to raise awareness of this (please see below).

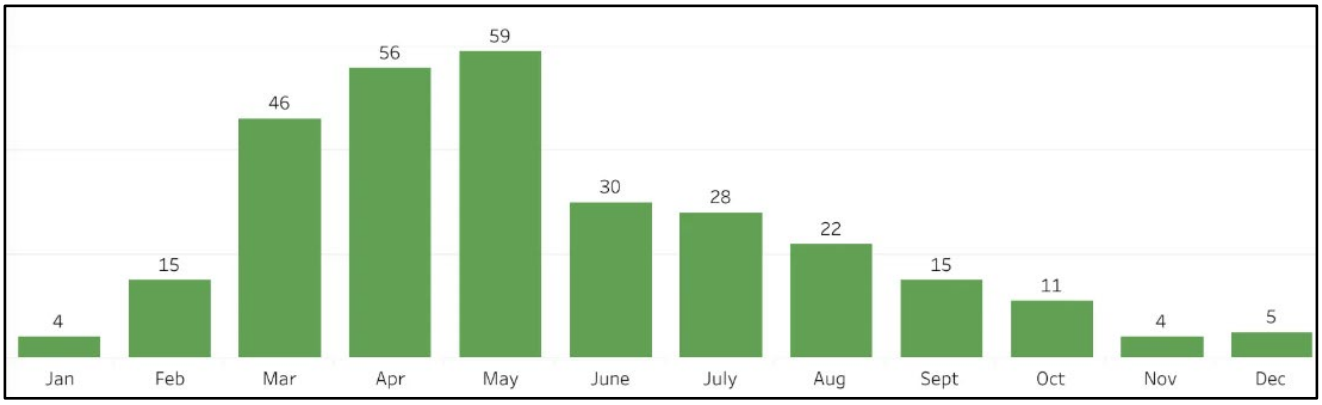

Figure 4. Seasonal distribution of coccidiosis cases in sheep in GB over the past 5 years, with the highest levels in March to May

Coccidiosis in lambs - EEDAS

Situation There have been cases in multiple flocks of deaths due to coccidiosis in pre-weaned lambs diagnosed in the past 2 weeks across our APHA surveillance network.

Details Coccidiosis is most commonly seen in lambs aged 4 to 8 weeks, with disease being uncommon in lambs older than 3 months. Clinical signs can include diarrhoea which may contain blood or mucus, straining to pass faeces, abdominal pain, condition loss, and death. Risk of disease is dependent on the balance between immunity of the lambs, infection pressure in the environment, and other stress factors. Diagnosis is based on clinical signs and examination of faecal samples for pathogenic coccidial oocysts. While oocyst counts can be extremely high, speciation is always recommended to confirm the diagnosis, as of the 11 Eimeria species in sheep, only *E. ovinoidalis* and *E. crandallis* are pathogenic. Very high counts (into the millions of oocysts per gram) can be seen with only non-pathogenic Eimeria species present for example in lambs scouring for other reasons. Postmortem examination with histopathology can also be useful.

Nematodirosis is a differential diagnosis for scouring and acute deaths in lambs in springtime, and the SCOPS Nematodirus hatching forecast should be used in combination with grazing history and other risk factors to determine the need for treatment. Whilst faecal egg counts are not useful in assessing the risk of disease due to *Nematodirus battus* larvae, they are an important tool to assess coccidial oocyst counts.

Further information can be found here: - NADIS Coccidiosis in Lambs

Fluke

There was a decrease in cases reported with chronic fluke for GB VIDA data. Despite the reduction, disease due to liver fluke is still present and can have a significant impact in some flocks. The need for quarantine testing and or treatment; consideration of the stages of the parasite likely to be present in the animal; use of appropriate diagnostic tests to support, and to check treatment efficacy; are all important to consider. Further information and advice on liver fluke are available on the SCOPS website. The seasonal pattern of chronic fluke cases is shown in figure 5.

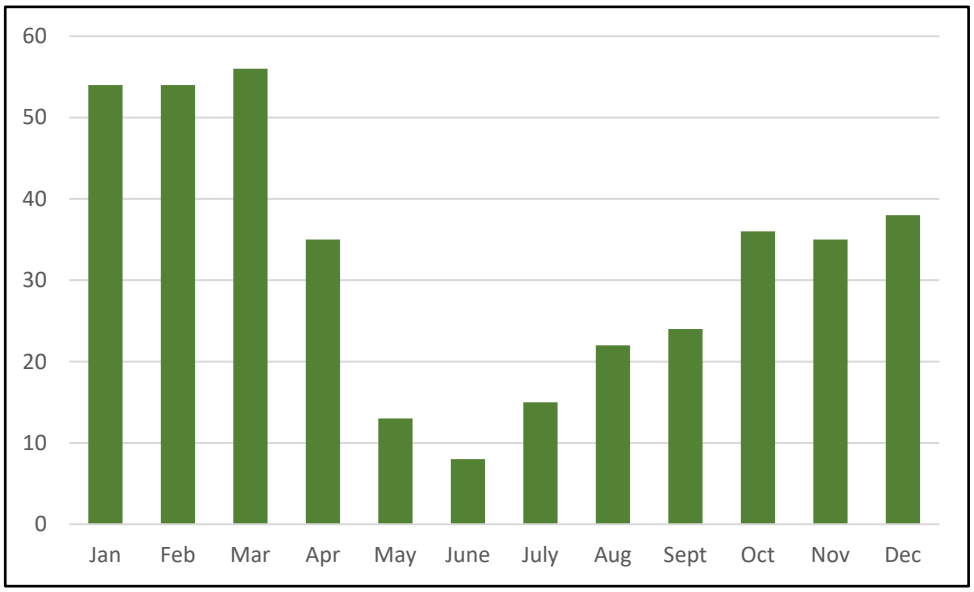

Figure 5. Seasonality of chronic fluke cases in sheep in GB, from 2021 to 2025 (VIDA data), showing cases are recorded throughout the year but lower numbers from May to July

In recent years, the pattern has been liver fluke infections acquired later in the season, so flukicides active against all stages (early immature to adult), used early in the season, may have been prior to infection (and none have persistent activity). Moving to use of flukicides active against late immatures and adults may then be mistimed and leave fluke parasites in the sheep. Liver fluke eggs hatch above 10 degrees centigrade, and this is when snail intermediate host activity also increases, so weather conditions that favour the snail in May to June, can lead to high levels of metacercariae on pasture 6 to 8 weeks later, for the ruminant host to ingest. Whereas dry conditions in early Summer may delay infection of snails pushing the life cycle later in the year. Identifying snail habitats and, avoiding grazing these areas at key times will reduce exposure and the need to treat, is a cornerstone of sustainable liver fluke control. Follow the SCOPS guidance on fluke and quarantine treatment and effective quarantine and treatments for roundworms, scab and fluke.

Systemic disease

Bibersteinia trehalosi and comorbidities

A review of case histories and details was undertaken following a series of Bibersteinia trehalosi cases, some of which were from flocks which had been fully vaccinated against this pathogen. The Small Ruminant Expert Group (SREG) analysed VIDA data from 2024 to explore this.

Thirty-three submissions coded for *B. trehalosi* were identified: 12 were fully vaccinated, 7 partially vaccinated, 4 unvaccinated and 10 of unknown status. Among the fully vaccinated flocks, concurrent conditions were common, and in some cases multiple comorbidities were present. Examples included parasitic gastroenteritis (the most frequently identified issue), selenium or cobalt deficiency, tick-borne fever, *Mycoplasma* pneumonia, and *Clostridium perfringens* disease. Across all 33 submissions, just 3 had no recorded concurrent disease, and only one that was fully vaccinated had no comorbidities. Management-related stressors, particularly recent handling, movement or dietary change, were described in most cases.

This dataset has limitations, as it reflects only diagnosed cases and is not case-controlled, preventing assessment of true prevalence or direct comparison with unaffected animals, and correct vaccine handling and administration could not be assessed from the available data. Nonetheless, the pattern of frequent comorbidities and management pressures suggests that outbreaks in vaccinated flocks are often multifactorial, rather than indicative of vaccine failure. Several concurrent conditions identified, such as heavy parasitic burdens, were severe enough to cause significant disease independently.

The findings support the continued use of *B. trehalosi* vaccination within flock herd health plans.

Intestinal disease

See conditions described under the parasitology section.

Respiratory disease

Ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma (OPA)

There were a range of different Ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma cases diagnosed during quarter 1, which included an atypical or mixed form infection in an aged ewe, a case of OPA in a 9-month-old lamb, as well as a diagnosis in a flock with elevated ewe mortality over a period of a few months.

Atypical OPA in an aged ewe

An atypical or mixed form OPA was identified in a 9-year-old ewe that had been examined postmortem for another reason. Atypical forms of OPA have more marked areas of fibrosis, myxomatous change (Figure 6) and lymphoplasmacytic infiltration. Atypical changes were present in this case along with more classic OPA histological changes, along with evidence of a secondary bacterial infection and a concurrent *Mycoplasma* spp, infection.

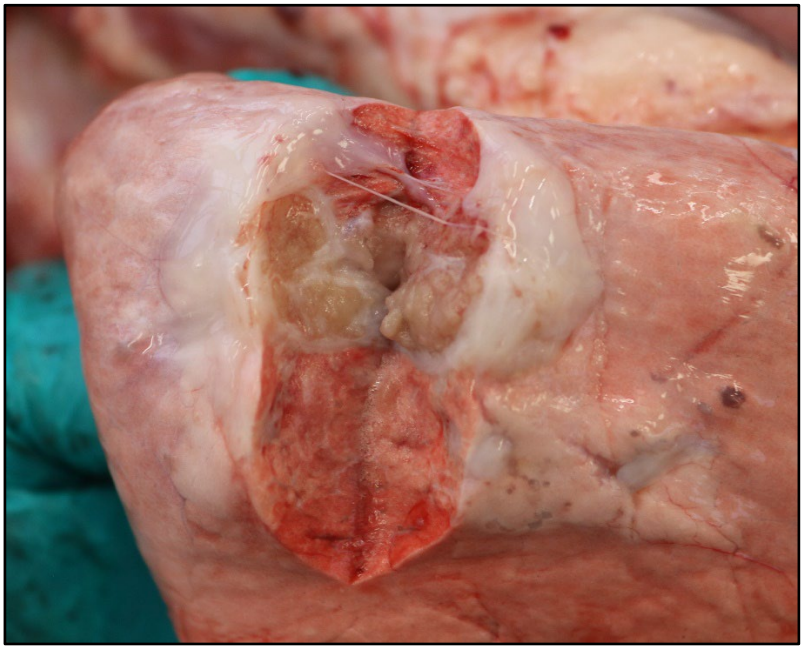

Figure 6. Atypical or mixed form OPA lesion in a 9-year-old ewe, with more marked fibrosis and myxomatous change

OPA in a 9-month-old lamb

Formalin fixed samples of kidney and lung were submitted from a 9-month-old lamb to investigate ongoing losses, where 20 out of a group of 180 lambs had died. The right middle lung lobe was described as ‘solid and grainy’. Lung histopathology identified a multifocal, acute, fibrinosuppurative and necrotising, bronchointerstitial pneumonia with fibrinous pleuritis suggestive of pasteurellosis, in addition to lesions of OPA.

OPA in a flock of ewes with respiratory signs and increased mortality

Formalin fixed samples of lung were submitted from a 4-year-old ewe to investigate respiratory issues in a flock where 25 out of 850 ewes had died within a few months, and 4 were “slow” and showing respiratory signs. Histopathological examination identified neoplastic cells consistent with a well differentiated pulmonary adenocarcinoma and a multifocal, acute, suppurative bronchopneumonia, indicating secondary bacterial infection had led to sudden death.

Laryngeal chondritis

Laryngeal chondritis is a not an uncommon diagnosis in sheep and is more typically described occurring in adult short-necked meat-breed sheep, with the condition particularly well-recognised in Texels and Beltex sheep. The specific triggers are often vague and anatomical narrowing of the larynx may be a risk factor in breeds such as Texels and Beltex; whereas laryngeal injury from drenching/bolus guns; or aspiration of grass awns; or foreign bodies such as from dry, dusty feed are speculated as potential causes in other cases. A range of bacteria are identified in these cases, such as *Fusobacterium necrophorum*, *Bibersteinia trehalosi*, *Trueperella pyogenes* and *Streptococcus* species (most typically *Streptococcus ovis*).

Relatively young lambs were affected in 2 flocks, which is a more unusual presentation. In cases involving young lambs, drenching trauma is often suspected as the cause. An 8-month-old Jacob lamb was submitted to investigate the cause of sudden death; the lamb was in a flock of 30 breeding ewes and was one of the 3 remaining weaned lambs in the flock. Gross postmortem examination revealed necrosis of the laryngeal tissues, with caseous material mixed with khaki liquid digesta within the laryngeal opening (Figure 7). *Fusobacterium necrophorum* was isolated from anaerobic culture supportive of laryngeal chondritis. *Streptococcus* spp. and *B. trehalosi* was also isolated from the larynx but is likely an incidental finding.

Figure 7. Necrosis of the laryngeal tissues in an eight-month-old Jacob lamb with laryngeal chondritis

Circulatory disease

There were anecdotal reports of ticks detected on livestock very early in this quarter. There was an increase in diagnoses of tick-borne fever made by APHA in quarter 1, with 6 diagnoses, compared to 14 diagnoses made in total this quarter over the previous 5 years. The diagnoses were made from carcase submissions of adult and post weaned animals, with a range of concurrent diseases also diagnosed, such as Tick pyaemia, Louping Ill, Bibersteinia septicaemia, and PGE.

Musculo-skeletal

Osteogenesis imperfecta in Valais Blacknose lambs

Two separate cases of suspected osteogenesis imperfecta were diagnosed in Valais Blacknose lambs this quarter.

The first case, a 7-day-old lamb, was submitted to VIC Carmarthen with a history of weakness and recumbency. On gross examination the long bones and ribs were weak and fragile and very easily broken, but no ante-mortem fractures were detected. In contrast, multiple fractures were identified in the bones of the hind limbs of a 2-week-old lamb submitted to VIC Thirsk, despite no history of significant trauma and an unassisted lambing.

Histopathological examination of various bone sections in both cases found changes consistent with bone fragility and abnormal bone growth, highly suggestive of a diagnosis of osteogenesis imperfecta. This is a disorder of type 1 collagen production, where mutations in specific genes result in poor formation of this fundamental protein, leading to abnormalities in bone structure and other connective tissues. Osteogenesis imperfecta may have a recessive or dominant mode of inheritance and has been documented in a range of livestock species.

APHA have recently identified an increased incidence of this disease in Valais Blacknose flocks potentially hinting at an autosomal recessive mode of inheritance in this breed; however, further genetic investigation, including detailed examination of breeding records across affected flocks, will be necessary to fully elucidate this.

First case of rickets reported in Devon

An Exmoor Mule-cross store lamb was euthanised and submitted to VIC Starcross to investigate the cause of varying degrees of stiffness, bunny hoping gait, and recumbency, which was affecting up to 100% of a single group of homebred, 9-to-10-month-old lambs, from a flock in North Devon.

Gross findings were minimal with no observable abnormalities in long bone anatomy, with no evidence of growth deviations, thickening of the growth plates, or fractures. Histopathological evaluation of the costochondral junction, distal femur, and proximal

humerus identified marked disruption of endochondrial ossification at the growth plates and epiphyseal cartilage, consistent with a diagnosis of rickets. The changes were deemed sufficiently severe to cause pain and induce the clinical signs reported.

Vitamin D deficiency is thought to be the principal cause of this condition and the exceptionally prolonged lack of sunlight this winter, combined with good quality grazing, was the likely underlying cause of the issue in this group. Trace element deficiencies and chronic parasitic gastroenteritis are also thought to be risk factors for the condition; however, there was no evidence of concurrent disease in the submitted lamb. Providing mineral supplementation to future lambs on this pasture and maintaining optimal general health was advised to reduce the risk of recurrence.

Cases of rickets have been reported in northern England (Mearns and others, 2008) and Scotland (Hurst and Others, 2020) in young sheep grazing dairy pasture in the winter months. This case is unusual being so far south, and to our knowledge is the first case definitively confirmed in Devon. A search of the VIDA database finds 7 recorded cases since 2014, predominantly in lambs from the North of England, with one case in West Wales and one in the Midlands. These were also in lambs of 10-12 months old. Sheep breeds with pigmented skin and in full fleece are more likely to be affected due to reduced photobiosynthesis. Sheep obtain vitamin D from UV radiation in the summer months or through their diet, however, there is little vitamin D in grass. In the face of dietary deficiency, vitamin D reserves will only last for approximately 6 weeks. Clinical signs are due to defective mineralization, with the fastest growing bones most often affected. This in combination with the lush grazing, which likely promotes faster growth rates, further exacerbates the problem. Crops containing carotene may also antagonise the effects of vitamin D, such as Italian ryegrass and turnips.

Mearns R, Scholes SFE, Wessels M, Whitaker K and Strugnell B (2008), Rickets in sheep flocks in northern England. Veterinary Record, 162: 98-99.

Hurst E, Henderson K, Stevenson H, Schwarz T, Scholes S, Carty H, Mason C and Mellanby RJ (2020), Rickets in Scottish blackface lambs on five South West Scotland farms. Vet Rec Case Rep, 8: e001008.

Diaphragmatic muscular hypertrophy and rupture

An adult Texel-cross ewe was submitted to VIC Thirsk after being the second ewe to be found unexpectedly dead after housing for lambing. Postmortem examination revealed a large haemorrhage on the thoracic aspect of the diaphragm, with the presence of a haematoma dissecting the diaphragmatic muscle layers, focused around the crura and aortic hiatus. The muscle of the diaphragm appeared subjectively mildly hypertrophied. In addition, frank blood, with occasional blood clots, filled the thoracic cavity. These findings were consistent with those previously described by Waine and Others (2019).

Waine K, Strugnell BW, Howie F, Swinson V and Millar M (2019), Diaphragmatic lesions and fatal haemorrhage in Texel sheep. Vet Rec Case Rep, 7: e000745.

Urinary disease

No significant changes to trends.

Nervous disease

Suspected Motor Neurone Disease in Zwartbles lambs

A problem of hind limb ataxia in young lambs was reported in a small 80-ewe Zwartbles flock. Two typical cases were submitted to VIC Thirsk to investigate. Affected lambs were bright and alert, and showed varying degrees of hind limb ataxia, with loss of withdrawal reflexes and deep pain sensation. Forelimbs were unaffected. Six lambs were showing clinical signs at the time of submission. Gross postmortem findings were unremarkable, with no visible abnormalities in the brains, spinal cords, local muscle groups, or joints. PCR testing for Border Disease virus gave negative results.

In both lambs the motor neurons of the brainstem and spinal cord had an unusual appearance on histopathological examination; having enlarged soma with pale cytoplasm and concentrically distributed, coarsely clumped Nissl-stained substance; potentially consistent with a form of motor neuron disease (MND). However, this diagnosis could not be definitively confirmed as not all the microscopic features of MND were present, and the nature and congenital onset of clinical signs were not consistent with MND as described in other breeds of sheep (Romney, Cheviot). There have been no previous recorded cases in Zwartbles.

Detailed documentation of future cases was advised including comprehensive clinical examination, including a full neurological examination, video recordings, and complete breeding records with dam and sire lineage. In other sheep breeds the condition arises due to mutations in the AGTPBP1 or TMCO6 genes, and collection of samples for genetic analysis to investigate which genes may be at fault in these lambs was recommended.

Parton K and Collett M. (2007). Floppy lamb syndrome — an inherited lower motor neuron disease in open-faced Romney lambs. *New Zealand Veterinary Journal*, *55*(1), 49.

Zhao X, Onteru S, Dittmer K and others. A missense mutation in *AGTPBP1* was identified in sheep with a lower motor neuron disease. *Heredity* 109, 156–162 (2012).

Anna Letko, Franz Brülisauer, Irene M. Häfliger, Eilidh Corr, Sandra Scholes, Cord Drögemüller (2023). Loss-of-function variant in the ovine TMCO6 gene in North Country Cheviot sheep with motor neuron disease. *Genomics,* Volume 115, Issue 5.

Reproductive

A complete analysis of abortion causes will be published in the Q2 report.

Skin

Ulcerative dermatitis in Scottish blackface ewes

A farm visit was carried out by SRUC Veterinary Services to a 1,000-ewe west-coast upland farm to investigate skin disease affecting 25% of a group of 440 Scottish blackface ewes. The other 2 groups, which used the same handling facilities, were unaffected. Initially only a few sheep were affected but, within a 2-month period, lesions were evident on 110 animals. Affected sheep generally had a single focal lesion on their ear tips, lips, nose or lower leg. Lesions from 3 affected animals were swabbed and a range of bacteria including *Streptococcus uberis*, *Streptococcus dysgalactiae*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Trueperella pyogenes* was isolated. Affected animals were treated with antimicrobials and the lesions resolved. Similar outbreaks of skin disease have been reported previously and investigated by SRUC Veterinary Services, and detection of *Streptococcus dysgalactiae* is a common finding. The inciting cause in this case was not clear, which is also consistent with previous reports.

Severe orf (Parapoxvirus) lesions in an 11-month-old ram

An 11-month-old Texel ram lamb, from a flock of 250 sheep including 200 breeding ewes, was received by Shrewsbury Veterinary Investigation Centre for postmortem examination to investigate the cause of extreme and severe orf / Parapoxvirus lesions. The lambs on this farm were routinely orf vaccinated at 6 weeks of age, and typically one orf case occurred each autumn. This year there were 4 affected animals, the submitted tup being the most severely affected, with lesions on the nose, all 4 legs, the sternum, and the ears. One ear lesion was 5cm in diameter (Figure 8), the sternal lesion was 10cm by 4cm, and the leg lesions (Figure 9) were multifocal to coalescing, measuring up to 7cm and were primarily located on the lower legs (metatarsus/metacarpus) extending upwards from the coronary band. Orf / Parapoxvirus infection was confirmed by a positive PCR result. The left prescapular lymph node was enlarged and contained 2 large yellow pus-filled abscesses, from which *Trueperella pyogenes* was isolated, likely secondary to the orf lesions. Extensive testing for potential causes of immunosuppression, such as Maedi visna, Border disease, vitamin B12 deficiency, and copper deficiency all proved negative or found normal results. Haematology demonstrated only a mild anaemia, and raised white cell counts consistent with a response to the chronic infection. Selenium testing of a blood sample, however, indicated the ram had suboptimal selenium status, which was of potential significance.

The cause of severe orf is uncertain and may be multifactorial, with an underlying immunosuppression, inadequate immunity from prior exposure, opportunistic infection of skin trauma from other causes, and excessively high infection exposure all potentially playing a role. In some cases, it seems individual sheep may be particularly vulnerable to infection. Control and prevention of severe orf cases relies on using vaccination, addressing potential causes of immunosuppression (such as trace element supplementation when relevant), and preventing skin trauma (such as thistle and thorn cutting).

Figure 8. Large orf lesion on the ear of a Texel ram lamb

Figure 9. Severe Orf lesions on the distal limb of a Texel ram lamb

Salmonellosis

Reports of salmonella in livestock, dogs, birds and wildlife in Great Britain can be found on GOV.UK.

Chemical food safety

Chemical Food Safety Reports can be found on GOV.UK.

Antimicrobial use and resistance

The VMD has launched a new digital service for reporting adverse events: New animal medicine adverse event reporting service launching May 2026 - GOV.UK

The Veterinary Antibiotic Resistance Sales and Surveillance (UK-VARRS) Report 2024 has recently been published by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD): Veterinary Antimicrobial Resistance and Sales Surveillance 2024 - GOV.UK

In addition, the latest RUMA Targets Task Force report can be found at: Latest RUMA Agriculture Targets Task Force report released – 18 November 2025 – RUMA

The Medicine Hub, a voluntary industry initiative, developed and managed by AHDB, was launched in 2021 and provides a central location for the collection of medicine data, including antibiotic use: Medicine Hub for dairy, beef and sheep farmers | AHDB

Centre of Expertise for Extensively Managed Livestock (COEEML)

The COEEML was developed by APHA to address potential surveillance gaps for extensively managed animals. Extensive management of livestock potentially makes regular or close inspection for disease detection more challenging. The Centre is based at the APHA Veterinary Investigation Centre in Carmarthen; however, it is a Great Britain-wide resource and forms part of the wider veterinary surveillance system operated by APHA. For more details, see the Animal disease scanning surveillance pages on GOV.UK.

TSE

Surveillance for transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) is conducted in the United Kingdom in animals susceptible to the disease. This includes cattle, sheep and goats. The main aim is to monitor trends in disease incidence and prevalence, to evaluate the effectiveness of TSE disease controls.

There are 2 categories of surveillance – passive and active.

Passive surveillance

This is when an animal with clinical signs suspicious of BSE or scrapie is reported to an APHA Office to be investigated. Such cases are slaughtered, and the examination of the brain determines whether the animal was affected by a TSE.

APHA has been recording and analysing data from reported cases in cattle since the start of the BSE epidemic in 1986, and for scrapie in sheep and goats since this disease became notifiable in 1993.

Active surveillance

The UK carries out active surveillance for TSEs.

The UK has:

- tested cattle since July 2001
- tested sheep and goats since January 2002
- conducted a survey in 2007 and 2008 of farmed and wild deer

View the updated TSE statistics on GOV.UK.

Horizon scanning

International Disease Monitoring (IDM) horizon-scanning activities monitor for major, notifiable, or new and re-emerging animal disease outbreaks worldwide. This is done to provide an early warning and to assess the risks they may pose to the United Kingdom (UK), particularly for those diseases which impact on animal health and welfare, international trade, public health, or wider society. IDM also assess the risk that animal diseases might come into the UK through the trade in animals or animal products (legal or illegal), through movements of wildlife, or through the movement of fomites and vectors such as insects which may carry infectious disease. These outbreak assessments are used to guide decisions on how to manage or reduce the risks and are published on the web: Animal diseases: international and UK monitoring.

Links to specific diseases:

Peste des petits ruminants in Europe.

Bluetongue virus in Europe.

Epizootic haemorrhagic disease in Europe.

Sheep and goat pox in Europe.

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD):

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Cyprus.

Links to information on differential diagnoses can be found here:

Differential diagnosis of diseases causing oral lesions in cattle - Holliman - 2005 - In Practice - Wiley Online Library

Differential diagnosis of oral lesions and FMD in sheep

The **Biothreats Emergence, Analysis and Communications Network (BEACON)** is an open-source informal surveillance program designed to revolutionize global biothreats surveillance and response. Leveraging advanced artificial intelligence (AI), large language models (LLMs) and a network of globally based experts, BEACON rapidly collects, analyses, and disseminates information on emerging infectious diseases affecting humans, animals and the environment.

Publications of interest

APHA Surveillance Reports on GOV.UK

Monthly APHA disease surveillance reports

APHA focus articles published in the Veterinary Record

The 2024 edition of the *Salmonella* in animals and feed in Great Britain (previously called *Salmonella* in Livestock Production in GB) has been published and is now available here: Salmonella in animals and feed in Great Britain

SRUC-VS Surveillance Reports

Scottish Government Veterinary Services Programme

SRUC Veterinary surveillance blogs

Veterinary surveillance blogs

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