

Bluetongue

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Although the United Kingdom left the European Union (EU) in 2021, certain pieces of legislation (known as 'assimilated law') continue to apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation, revoked or permitted to expire. This means that our guidance still contains references to legislation that originated from the EU.

ALERT

Latest situation

January 2024

Bluetongue restrictions are in place in England and [movement licences](#) are currently required. [More >](#)

This guidance is for England

Bluetongue is a viral disease affecting all ruminants such as cattle and sheep, as well as goats and deer. It also affects camelids such as llamas and alpacas. It does not affect horses or pigs.

Bluetongue is notifiable. If you suspect bluetongue you must by law immediately notify the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA - 03000 200301). Failure to do so is an offence.

What is the possible impact of the disease?

Outbreaks can result in prolonged animal movement and trade restrictions as well as productivity losses. From a welfare perspective, the disease can cause animals to suffer. Affected animals are often killed to prevent disease spread and unnecessary suffering.

Clinical signs

Bluetongue is mainly spread by infected adult midges (*Culicoides* species), which can be found throughout Great Britain, biting an animal susceptible to the disease. Infected midges can spread locally and more widely in certain temperatures and wind conditions. The virus can also be spread through infected blood or germinal products, as well as through the movement of infected animals. The disease is not transmitted by direct or indirect contact between animals in the absence of insects. Other disease vectors have been identified, including to unborn offspring. More information on [how bluetongue is spread](#) is available on the GOV.UK website.

If you keep livestock, you must be aware of the clinical signs and immediately report any suspicion of bluetongue disease in your animals.

Symptoms vary across different species, but they can include fever, lesions, and reddening of the mouth, eyes, nose and coronary band, as well as excessive salivation, nasal discharge, abortion and sometimes death. Information on [how to spot bluetongue](#) across different species is available on the GOV.UK website.

What happens if a suspect animal is found?

APHA will conduct a veterinary investigation. If disease cannot be ruled out then samples must be taken for laboratory analysis.

A veterinary inspector will produce an inventory of all animals on the premises, as well as investigating any possible sources and vector control. A notice will place the suspected premises under restrictions. The movement of ruminant animals and germinal products on to or off the premises, and anywhere that susceptible animals may have been exposed to the disease, will be prohibited pending the results of the laboratory tests.

At this stage, a 10 km radius temporary control zone (TCZ), or of an appropriate size to contain disease, may be put in place around the affected premises. This will restrict all movements of susceptible animals, carcasses and germinal products except under veterinary licence.

Restrictions are lifted if disease is not confirmed.

What happens if disease is confirmed?

If bluetongue is confirmed at the premises, and there appears to be limited local spread, it is likely that an attempt will be made to contain and eradicate the disease by culling the affected ruminant animals.

If bluetongue virus is believed to be spreading beyond the local area and cannot be isolated in a control zone (CZ) of an appropriate size to contain disease, movement restrictions will be declared around the infected premises. Susceptible animals, carcasses and germinal products are not permitted to move from premises within the CZ.

If it is confirmed through surveillance that bluetongue is circulating, disease control measures will then depend on the strain of bluetongue and its method of introduction, though controls are likely to involve larger control zones and possible vector control measures. A restricted zone (RZ) (with a radius of at least 100 km) and a surveillance zone (SZ) (with a depth of at least 50 km beyond the RZ) will be declared. The movement of susceptible animals and germinal products out of an RZ is not permitted, except under licence and to limit the risk of further disease spread.

More information is contained in the [GB Bluetongue Virus Disease Control Strategy](#), which sets out the disease control measures, including likely measures dependent upon the strain of bluetongue detected.

Can people catch the disease?

Bluetongue is an insect-borne viral disease affecting ruminants. The disease is not known to affect humans. There is no risk to human health.

Could it affect the food I eat?

No, it doesn't affect food we eat and it can't be contracted by consuming animal products.

What can be done to reduce the risks?

Keepers should consider the time of year; midges are mainly active between March and November, but may still be present until December or January. Meteorological conditions, such as temperature and wind direction, are likely to increase the chance of infection during these months. Other variables such as topography and proximity to, and the size of, neighbouring farms also influence how easily and how far midges can spread the disease.

Whilst the threat from midges cannot be eliminated, steps can be taken to mitigate the risk of disease spread. Measures could include:

- minimising animal movements during high risk periods to reduce the risk of moving infected animals or bringing midges with animals
- sourcing animals responsibly, including when [importing animals](#)
- remaining vigilant and reporting any suspicion of bluetongue disease immediately
- considering voluntarily implementing vector control measures. Midges breed in damp soils with high organic content, such as muckheaps; treating these with insecticides or keeping susceptible livestock and livestock housing distant from them may reduce biting frequency and therefore bluetongue transmission
- practicing [good biosecurity](#) on livestock premises

Further information

Detailed information on [how to spot and report bluetongue](#) can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Disease alerts

Livestock keepers can stay up to date with the latest bluetongue developments via the APHA [alert subscription service](#).

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see '[Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties](#)'.

In this update

New guidance: January 2024

Key legislation

[Assimilated Regulation \(EC\) No 1266/2007](#) as regards the control, monitoring, surveillance and restrictions on movements of certain animals of susceptible species in relation to bluetongue

[Bluetongue Regulations 2008](#)

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links often only shows the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on changes to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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