



February 2025

Upcoming Beef + Flock Club meeting – all welcome

An alternative to iodine navel dips came on the market in spring last year and have been the subject of a large-scale study into how successful it is. We are lucky to be welcoming Su Page and vet Karen Ingleby to Brendon Farm, Boyton this February to discuss and demonstrate the product. Vets Lucy, Tim and Roger will be attending to help field any questions about the upcoming 2025 lambing and calving season.

When? Thursday 13th Feb, 11am – 2pm

Where? Brendon Farm, Boyton PL15 8NU, kindly hosted by the Gubbins

Attendance is included in our flock and beef club memberships, or £25 per farm. Our club membership is available for £8/month, which include three worm egg counts annually (£22 ex VAT each), as well as attendance to our meetings. Give the practice a call if you'd like to register to attend, or even sign up as a member!



BTV-3 (Bluetongue) Update

By now, most farmers are aware of the threat of *Bluetongue*, a viral disease spread by midges, a new type of which (BTV-3) has emerged in Europe over the past 18 months. On the 21st of January 2025, the government declared a 'seasonally low vector period' – essentially meaning midge activity has been low enough (for long enough) to enable the free movement of stock again.

This means the below restrictions in zones previously 'locked down' to try and reduce BTV-3 spread, have been lifted:

- The requirement for post-movement testing of animals
- The use of insecticide on vehicles
- The requirement to send animals from the Restricted Zone to designated abattoirs



BTV-3: The 'new' Disease

- Around 2/3rds of animals infected will show no signs, but can infect midges for at least 3 day
- More dangerous to sheep than cattle
- 50-70% of sheep which show clinical signs die from them
- No sheep → sheep direct transmission, so no contingency culling



In November 2024 we held a very well attended meeting on Bluetongue at the practice, to address concerns and explain the use and availability of vaccines. We have adapted the published Sheep Vet Society guidance to share it with you. Hopefully, this information can help with your choices for 2025.

The risks

The disease is very likely to over winter from 2024 into 2025 and will therefore reappear earlier in 2025 than 2024 (it wasn't detected until August 2024). BTV3 replicates best at warmer temperatures, and so if spring and summer are warm in 2025, the spread, infection rates and severity of disease are likely to represent a worst-case scenario for UK livestock.

Movement restrictions have done a good job of containing the disease to the East and South of England, low livestock density areas, in 2024. However, these restrictions have affected farming businesses financially. This ongoing financial burden will be weighed against the potential reduction in disease spread that movement restriction may provide in 2025, when the disease re-emerges. Vaccination is therefore an important remaining viable control option.

Control measures other than vaccination

As a vector borne virus, spread by *Culicoides spp* midges, infection and spread is difficult to control. Exposure can be reduced by housing in airy, positively ventilated buildings, which have external screens of mesh with holes less than 0.5mm, although this is seldom practical in UK farm situations. **Insecticides** (Clik/Crovect/FlyPour etc) **do not help** due to their extremely short-lived activity against midges, and slow speed of kill. For example, **think how often mosquito repellent needs reapplying while camping!** Unfortunately, it only takes one infected midge bite to set up infection.



Vaccination

The choice facing vets and farmers to control this disease is whether to vaccinate or not and when. The potential impact of disease, in terms of animal welfare and losses, must be weighed against the cost of labour and buying the vaccine. It can't be accurately predicted how widespread infection may become once conditions for increased midge activity resume.

However, there is information that can help us from the 2024 incursion in the UK and the 2023-2024 outbreaks in the Netherlands and Germany.

- Of the sheep with clinical signs in the UK in 2024, it is estimated that the case mortality rate was 70% (F. Lovatt and R. Tarlinton, personal comms), like that seen elsewhere in Europe (Stellungnahme, 2024)
- In Germany, mortality (whole flock) in vaccinated flocks was 1-2% compared with 25-30% in unvaccinated flocks (Stellungnahme, 2024)

To help vets and farmers decide whether to vaccinate livestock, several UK livestock organizations have worked together to produce a BTV3 vaccines risk assessment template, which can be found on the Ruminant Health and Welfare Group (RHWG) website here:

<https://ruminanthw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Questions-for-vets-to-ask-clients-to-help-decision-of-whether-to-vaccinate-against-BTV3-02.pdf>

Cost

£160 for 50 doses, 10% off for cash purchase.

We will send a licence to you as the purchaser, and a link to an online form which you are required to complete. This is so the APHA has knowledge of sales, species vaccinated and geographic spread of vaccine.

When to vaccinate?

In 2025, there is time to get livestock vaccinated and establish immunity before exposure. It takes several weeks between initial vaccination and onset of immunity, especially in cattle, therefore waiting to vaccinate until the virus has spread to the local area may be too late to provide adequate, timely protection.

Midge activity started in March 2024, and has only been declared 'low' as of 21st January 2025. This means midge activity may increase again, sooner than we would like. It is important to remember that BTV-3 is a blood-borne virus, so any vaccination AFTER the virus is circulating, would need to include changing needles between each animal. This is to avoid accidentally spreading BTV-3 through a group of livestock, after injecting of an asymptomatic carrier (healthy-looking, but infected animal).



While the safety of the vaccines has not been established in breeding males, these are often the highest value animals on the farm and thousands have been successfully vaccinated in Europe. However, we recommend that bulls and rams should not be vaccinated in the 8 weeks before breeding, as a precaution.

For those farms wishing to vaccinate, the time to do so is ideally before midges start to circulate the virus again! The vaccine can be used safely in pregnant ewes, and we may see some residual immunity being passed onto their lambs via the colostrum, though this has not been proven.

Should I vaccinate my cattle, as well as my sheep?

Vaccination of cattle may have some benefit for cattle themselves (particularly important in high value pedigree animals and bulls). There are reports of increased barren rates in positive serology cows, in addition to the 'classical' signs of bluetongue, but the clinical severity and impact of BTV3 in cattle is much reduced compared with sheep (Stellungnahme, 2024, F. Lovatt and R. Tarlinton, personal comms). However, the likely greater impact of vaccinating cattle, could be reducing the circulating levels of virus, to protect sheep.



The last point on vaccination is that there is currently supply, we do not need to tell you about how important that is after the **last few years of poor supply of sheep vaccines**. A concern with waiting is that supply maybe reduced later in the summer, especially if there is perceived to be an increased risk and a rush on vaccination.

Notices

Goat Disbudding questionnaire:

<https://www.goatvetsoc.co.uk/news/gvs-disbudding-of-goats-consultation-questionnaire/>

This questionnaire is open to ANYONE associated with disbudding goats – veterinarians, farmers, nurses, smallholders, pet goat owners. The society is aiming to gather opinions about this procedure in the UK setting, as we're quite different from other parts of the world in our attitudes to disbudding!

Animal Health and Welfare Pathway -Dairy Update

The government has now allocated Dairy premises funding to perform PI hunts for BVD, as part of their 'endemic follow up'. This funding exceeds £1,500 and is aimed at identifying and removing animals who are persistently infected with BVD from the herd. Speak to your routine vet or give us a call for more details!

