

Bluetongue, your questions answered.

Bluetongue is a notifiable disease of sheep, cattle and goats

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What are the symptoms of bluetongue?

Symptoms of bluetongue include:

- fever
- lethargy (sluggish and drowsy)
- lameness
- swelling of the tongue, mouth, head and neck

Animals may die or take a long time to recover. They lose weight, and their milk yield drops and may never fully recover.

How is it spread?

Bluetongue is spread by biting midges of the culicoides genus. The blue tongue virus (BTV) is passed from an infected animal to the midge when it bites that animal. An uninfected animal becomes infected when it is bitten by a midge carrying the virus. The BTV does not spread directly between animals without the assistance of the midge.

The disease was first diagnosed in Northern Europe in 2007. It spread widely and rapidly but following successful vaccination campaigns there were only a very small number of cases. It has never been diagnosed in the Bailiwick of Guernsey.

How quickly can it spread?

The disease may spread over a large area as midges take to the air in favorable conditions and are blown in the winds up to 200km. Conditions for midges to be blown are dependent on temperature, wind strength, natural features and other factors. Midges travel the greatest distances over water in light winds and in dry conditions. Therefore infected midges could travel from the south coast of England or from the adjacent coasts of Normandy or Brittany to the Channel Islands in a day.

What has been done to protect the Bailiwick from bluetongue?

If animals are not bitten by infected midges then they will not be infected with the virus. Anything that livestock keepers can do to reduce their livestock being bitten may help. The use of insect deterrents or killers can help protect livestock. Anyone moving a horse from France to the Bailiwick

is advised to spray their lorry or horse box with insect deterrents or killers to avoid any midges hitching a lift. Midges are most active and most likely to bite livestock at dusk and dawn so housing livestock at these times will reduce the likelihood of livestock being bitten. The use of fans in housing also reduces the chances of livestock being bitten too. Midges tend to congregate around hedgerows, trees and boggy areas so avoid these and keep livestock in breezy open fields during the risk months from June to November. Midges need moisture to breed so ensuring that livestock are kept away from dung heaps, standing water and puddles will also reduce their exposure to being bitten.

Studies indicate that an average air temperature of at least 15°C is required for BTV transmission because below 15°C the virus does not multiply in the midge. In Guernsey BTV transmission is extremely unlikely to take place between the months of December and March when mean air temperatures are below 12°C, and unlikely to take place between the months of November and June when temperatures are below 15°C.

What other action has been taken?

Blood sampling and testing unvaccinated cattle in Guernsey, Alderney and Sark took place in 2012, 2013 and 2014 with negative results. The Island is free of disease and we are awaiting official freedom of bluetongue disease status.

Can we vaccinate against bluetongue?

We submitted a bluetongue risk assessment with Jersey in September 2015 and because the risk at that time was assessed as 'low to medium with a medium level of uncertainty' we applied for permission to allow voluntary vaccination against bluetongue. This permission was granted.

Is there any risk to humans?

No, there is no risk to humans.

What should I do if I suspect this disease in animals?

If you suspect disease then you must contact the States Veterinary Officer.