

Bluetongue virus (BTV) in ruminants



What is bluetongue? In the UK, bluetongue is a notifiable disease (this includes BTV-3, BTV-8 and any other BTV serotypes). If you suspect the disease you **MUST** report it immediately by calling:

03000 200 301 in England

03003 038 268 in Wales

Your local Field Services Office in Scotland

Which species are affected?

Bluetongue virus (BTV) affects cattle, sheep, goats, deer, and camelids - such as llamas and alpacas.

How is it spread?

The most common source of infection is through *Culicoides* biting midges. However, it can also spread through the movement of infected animals and animal products, or infected pregnant animals transmitting the virus to their young.

Clinical signs of bluetongue

Sheep

Sheep are more likely to show obvious clinical signs of bluetongue, these include:

- Ulcers or sores in the mouth and nose
- Discharge from the eyes or nose and drooling from the mouth
- Swelling of the lips, tongue, head and neck and the coronary band (where the skin of the leg meets the horn of the foot)
- Other clinical signs:
 - Red skin as a result of blood collecting beneath the surface
 - Fever
 - Lameness
 - Breathing problems
 - Abortion, foetal deformities and stillbirths
 - Death

Cattle

Signs of the disease include:

- Lethargy
- Crusty erosions around the nostrils and muzzle
- Redness of the mouth, eyes and nose
- Reddening of the skin above the hoof
- Nasal discharge
- Reddening and erosions on the teats
- Fever
- Milk drop
- Not eating
- Abortion, foetal deformities and stillbirths

Adult cattle may serve as a source of virus for several weeks while displaying little or no clinical signs of disease and are often the preferred host for insect vectors.

Calves and lambs

Calves and lambs can become infected with bluetongue before birth if the mother is infected while pregnant.

Signs of infection include:

- Offspring born small, weak, deformed or blind
- Death of offspring within a few days of birth
- Abortion, foetal deformities and stillbirths

Livestock keepers and vets should consider bluetongue as a possible cause for calves and lambs showing these [signs](#).

Pictures of sheep with bluetongue



This sheep has a high temperature, reddening of the mouth and lining of the nose. The lips, tongue and face are swollen



Foot of a lame sheep with BTV. Note the reddening of the skin at the top of the horn (coronary band). In some cases, horn may slough off



This is an image of the roof of the mouth (hard palate) of a sheep with BTV. Note there are blood spots (haemorrhages) on the ridges of the palate and also on the lips



A sheep with BTV. Note the swelling (oedema) of the muzzle and face and the crusting and discharge around the nose

Bluetongue hotline: **024 7771 0386** available 9-5 on Mon-Fri
Bluetongue hub: www.ruminanthw.org.uk/bluetongue-virus/

@Ruminanthw

updated June 2026

Bluetongue virus (BTV) in ruminants



What can you do?

Advice to farmers and their vets:

- Farmers need to beware when buying animals in
- Take actions to report any signs
- Remain vigilant and monitor livestock closely
- Use our tools and resources to assess your farms risk to BTV and consider vaccination

Can I move my animals?

If it is essential for you to move animals, please observe the following information on licensing

1. View the live [APHA interactive bluetongue virus map](#) to find latest information on BTV zones e.g. Restricted Zones (RZ) and Temporary Control Zones (TCZs).

2. If you are in a RZ or TCZ find latest movement and licensing information on the Defra website. Move animals according to the latest updates - remembering all movements must also comply with your normal movement licence. Also see the Bluetongue Movements Checker for advice on movement and licensing requirements: <https://ruminanthw.org.uk/bluetongue-virus-hub/bluetongue-movements-checker/>

Is a vaccine available?

- Defra's Secretary of State has permitted the use of three BTV-3 vaccines subject to a valid licence or declaration
- You can compare the three BTV-3 vaccine claims on our Vaccine Comparison Tables available at: <https://ruminanthw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Updated-BTV-Vaccines-comparison-table-10.07.25.pdf>
- Discuss the suitability and merits of vaccination with your private veterinarian
- Animal keepers in England must comply with the general licence conditions when using these vaccines
- There are also vaccines available for BTV-8 in the UK. Please see the Vaccine Comparison Tables for BTV-8 here: <https://ruminanthw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/BTV-8-Vaccine-Comparison-Tables-24.04.26.pdf>



For the most up-to-date information and access to our tools and resources visit the RH&W bluetongue hub



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

For queries relating to bluetongue surveillance testing or licences, visit Defra



Bluetongue does not affect people or food safety, but outbreaks can result in prolonged restrictions on animal movement and trade.

Bluetongue hotline: **024 7771 0386** available 9-5 on Mon-Fri
Bluetongue hub: www.ruminanthw.org.uk/bluetongue-virus/



@Ruminanthw

updated June 2026