What should farmers do to safeguard their herd?

Farmers and other owners of ruminant animals should familiarise themselves with the signs of the disease and be on the alert for abnormal behaviour or illness in cattle, sheep, goats and deer especially during warm weather (see clinical signs leaflet on website). Bluetongue is a notifiable disease. Any suspicions of the disease should be reported immediately to the local District Veterinary Office.

What is BTV infection?

It is a viral infection of most domestic and wild ruminants such as cattle, sheep, goats, etc. There are 12 strains of BTV, with only five strains occurring in Europe. BTV has been found in sheep in the Mediterranean countries of the EU, but not in other parts of Europe. In August 1998, an intensive surveillance programme in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany and by the end of 2007 had operated a total of 10,000 samples. This surveillance was partly financed by the EU.

How does it affect livestock?

Cattle is less likely to show signs of disease than sheep. In northern Europe, many herds and flocks had only one or two animals affected. In affected cattle herds, the average morbidity was 5% and mortality was less than 1%. In cattle, the disease is less severe in the second season than the first.

The following list summarises those clinical signs that one might expect to see in animals with acute infection:

Cattle:
- Sore and crusts on the face
- Drooping mouth and nose
- Dullness
- Off feed
- Frothing at the mouth
- Weight loss

Sheep:
- Sore and crusts on the face
- Drooping mouth and nose
- Dullness
- Off feed
- Frothing at the mouth
- Weight loss

How do animals become infected?

The virus is mainly transmitted by vectors (biting midges, of the Culicoides species), although transovarial transmission (i.e. from the nest to the adult mosquito) has also been observed in certain species. The virus is also spread via infected semen. Infection follows exposure to the virus, which is shed into the environment, so cleaning and disinfection will be important. The virus may survive over the winter, but the mechanism for this to happen.

Should BTV get to Ireland how would it affect trade?

The trade implications of BTV confirmed in Ireland will depend on the situation in the country of origin of the infected animals:
- If the country or area of destination is bluetongue free, but affected by the same strain of BTV in the same season, as Ireland is, then circulation is low and the possibility for the disease to happen.

How long does it take animals to become sick if bitten by a BTV-infected midge?

Between 4 and 20 days, depending on the type of animal, its age, the strain of the virus and the dose of the virus received.

How could BTV get to Ireland?

Firstly by importing an animal that is carrying the virus. Only 1 in 5 animals infected with BTV will show clinical signs. The virus may be shed and passed on to other animals, but clinical signs may not be apparent until four to 20 days after bite. The spread of the virus may occur by the same route as the initial infection, with infected semen or other biological material. Depending of the strain of the virus and the dose of the virus received. Between 4 and 20 days, depending on the type of animal, its age, the strain of the virus and the dose of the virus received.

How is BTV controlled?

The countries affected by BTV do not use vaccines. The strategy is to control the disease by the detection of infected animals and implementing an eradication programme. The disease will be declared eradicated when there are no clinical cases for at least 12 months, and no vector activity has been detected.

What is DAFF doing?

DAFF have initiated two levels of surveillance. The first involves a blood test on cattle and sheep, and includes:
- Post-import testing of all imported ruminants from EU countries
- Surveillance of randomly selected herds throughout the country or area of destination

The second level of surveillance involves trapping midges in the country or area of destination. Policymakers will determine appropriate from time-to-time.

Apart from the surveillance programme and the import control measures currently in place, the Department requires exporters to contingency arrangements (including arrangements for possible vaccination). The trade implications will depend on the country of destination and the policy of that country in the event of an outbreak of BTV. Should BTV get into Ireland how would it affect trade?

The trade implications of BTV confirmed in Ireland will depend on the situation in the country of origin of the infected animals:
- If the country or area of destination is bluetongue free, but affected by the same strain of BTV in the same season, the possibility for the disease to happen.

Can animals be imported from affected countries?

The importation of live ruminants from bluetongue restricted areas is currently prohibited to ensure the animals are protected from BTV infection by:
- Post-interdiction of all imported ruminants from EU countries
- Surveillance of randomly selected herds throughout the country or area of destination

There are also implications for live animals exported from Ireland, depending on which part of the country or area of destination.

What is DAFF doing?

DAFF have initiated two levels of surveillance.

1. DAFF have initiated two levels of surveillance. The first involves a blood test on cattle and sheep, and includes:
- Post-import testing of all imported ruminants from EU countries
- Surveillance of randomly selected herds throughout the country or area of destination

The second level involves trapping midges in the country or area of destination. Policymakers will determine appropriate from time-to-time.

Apart from the surveillance programme and the import control measures currently in place, the Department requires exporters to contingency arrangements (including arrangements for possible vaccination). The trade implications will depend on the country of destination and the policy of that country in the event of an outbreak of BTV.

How does it affect livestock?

Cattle is less likely to show signs of disease than sheep. In northern Europe, many herds and flocks had only one or two animals affected. In infected cattle herds, the average morbidity was 5% and mortality was less than 1%. In cattle, the disease is less severe in the second season than the first.

The following list summarises those clinical signs that one might expect to see in animals with acute infection:

Cattle:
- Sore and crusts on the face
- Drooping mouth and nose
- Dullness
- Off feed
- Frothing at the mouth
- Weight loss

Sheep:
- Sore and crusts on the face
- Drooping mouth and nose
- Dullness
- Off feed
- Frothing at the mouth
- Weight loss

How could BTV get to Ireland?

Firstly by importing an animal that is carrying the virus. Only 1 in 5 animals infected with BTV will show clinical signs. The virus may be shed and passed on to other animals, but clinical signs may not be apparent until four to 20 days after bite. The spread of the virus may occur by the same route as the initial infection, with infected semen or other biological material. Depending of the strain of the virus and the dose of the virus received. Between 4 and 20 days, depending on the type of animal, its age, the strain of the virus and the dose of the virus received.

How is BTV controlled?

The countries affected by BTV do not use vaccines. The strategy is to control the disease by the detection of infected animals and implementing an eradication programme. The disease will be declared eradicated when there are no clinical cases for at least 12 months, and no vector activity has been detected.

What is DAFF doing?

DAFF have initiated two levels of surveillance.

1. DAFF have initiated two levels of surveillance. The first involves a blood test on cattle and sheep, and includes:
- Post-import testing of all imported ruminants from EU countries
- Surveillance of randomly selected herds throughout the country or area of destination

The second level involves trapping midges in the country or area of destination. Policymakers will determine appropriate from time-to-time.

Apart from the surveillance programme and the import control measures currently in place, the Department requires exporters to contingency arrangements (including arrangements for possible vaccination). The trade implications will depend on the country of destination and the policy of that country in the event of an outbreak of BTV.

How does it affect livestock?

Cattle is less likely to show signs of disease than sheep. In northern Europe, many herds and flocks had only one or two animals affected. In infected cattle herds, the average morbidity was 5% and mortality was less than 1%. In cattle, the disease is less severe in the second season than the first.

The following list summarises those clinical signs that one might expect to see in animals with acute infection:

Cattle:
- Sore and crusts on the face
- Drooping mouth and nose
- Dullness
- Off feed
- Frothing at the mouth
- Weight loss

Sheep:
- Sore and crusts on the face
- Drooping mouth and nose
- Dullness
- Off feed
- Frothing at the mouth
- Weight loss

How could BTV get to Ireland?

Firstly by importing an animal that is carrying the virus. Only 1 in 5 animals infected with BTV will show clinical signs. The virus may be shed and passed on to other animals, but clinical signs may not be apparent until four to 20 days after bite. The spread of the virus may occur by the same route as the initial infection, with infected semen or other biological material. Depending of the strain of the virus and the dose of the virus received. Between 4 and 20 days, depending on the type of animal, its age, the strain of the virus and the dose of the virus received.

How is BTV controlled?

The countries affected by BTV do not use vaccines. The strategy is to control the disease by the detection of infected animals and implementing an eradication programme. The disease will be declared eradicated when there are no clinical cases for at least 12 months, and no vector activity has been detected.

What is DAFF doing?

DAFF have initiated two levels of surveillance.

1. DAFF have initiated two levels of surveillance. The first involves a blood test on cattle and sheep, and includes:
- Post-import testing of all imported ruminants from EU countries
- Surveillance of randomly selected herds throughout the country or area of destination

The second level involves trapping midges in the country or area of destination. Policymakers will determine appropriate from time-to-time.