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trading standards law explained

Bluetongue

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

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.

This guidance is for England

Bluetongue is a viral disease affecting all ruminants, such as cattle, sheep, 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) on 0300 020 0301. Failure to do so is an offence.

Bluetongue prevention measures

Information on the latest situation across Great Britain can be found on the websites of the UK Government, Scottish Government and Welsh Government.

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 should be aware of the clinical signs and must 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, 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 susceptible 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 Temporary Control Zone (TCZ) with a 10 km radius (or an appropriate size to contain the disease) may be put in place around the affected premises. This will restrict all movements of susceptible animals, carcases 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 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 the disease, movement restrictions will be declared around the infected premises. Susceptible animals, carcases 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 CZs 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, following the radius of the RZ) will be declared.

The movement of susceptible animals and germinal products out of an RZ is not permitted (except under licence) to limit the risk of further disease spread.

Keepers can use APHA's online animal disease licensing service to apply for a specific licence for any movement, within any of the types of bluetongue zone described above, that is not covered by a general licence. More information on bluetongue movement licences, designated slaughterhouses and slaughter markets can be found on the GOV.UK website.

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 and camelids. 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 the 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 muck heaps; treating these with insecticides or keeping susceptible livestock and livestock housing distant from them may reduce biting frequency and therefore bluetongue transmission

- Practising good biosecurity on livestock premises

Notifiable diseases

For information on diseases that are notifiable (which means there is a legal requirement to report cases and suspected cases to APHA), please see 'Notifiable diseases'.

Disease alerts

Livestock keepers can stay up to date with the latest bluetongue developments via the APHA alert subscription service.

Further information

Detailed information on how to spot and report bluetongue can be found on the GOV.UK website, along with specific guidance on bluetongue and camelids.

Keepers in specified zones can get free bluetongue testing.

More information on the latest assessment of bluetongue virus in Europe is available on the GOV.UK website.

Permits have been issued for the use of specified unauthorised bluetongue serotype 3 (BTV-3) vaccines within the United Kingdom, subject to licence. Keepers should contact their private veterinarian if they want to use any of the available BTV-3 vaccines.

APHA has produced several resources on bluetongue, including posters and videos.

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 section: 'Bluetongue prevention measures'.

Last reviewed / updated: June 2026

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 go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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