

22 October 2008

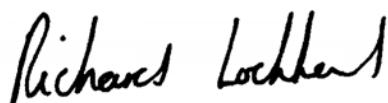
Dear Keeper,

BLUETONGUE (BTV8) VACCINATION IN SCOTLAND

You will be aware that the Scottish Government and the Bluetongue Industry Stakeholder Group (the Group) have decided to implement a vaccination campaign against bluetongue type 8 (BTV8) for all susceptible animals in Scotland. To allow this, Scotland will be declared a 'Protection Zone' on Monday 3 November 2008. In advance of this I thought it would be useful to provide you with some information on how the vaccination campaign will be carried out and the reasons behind it.

Declaring a BTV8 Protection Zone in Scotland legally allows vaccination to take place here. Under EU rules this also allows free movement of cattle and sheep from other Protection Zones, such as those in place in England and Wales. In the next few pages I explain the reasons why the decision to vaccinate our livestock was taken, and why we have waited until now to start. I outline which animals must be vaccinated as part of the compulsory campaign, and which ones can be vaccinated on a voluntary basis. Details of how to obtain vaccine from your veterinary surgeon, and when vaccination should be carried out are also given. I advise on co-ordinating vaccination with identification inspections. Information on requirements to be fulfilled before moving animals out of the Protection Zone is also outlined.

I am confident that vaccination against bluetongue this winter is the most effective method to safeguard Scotland from the potentially devastating effects of a bluetongue outbreak, and I am grateful for your help in ensuring that the vaccination campaign is successful. Bluetongue continues to remain a threat to the livestock industry in Scotland and, whilst we are vaccinating this year against BTV8, it remains imperative that care continues to be taken and that the sourcing of stock from high risk areas is avoided.



RICHARD LOCHHEAD

1. Why we must vaccinate

The decision to commence vaccination was taken in light of the increasing numbers of bluetongue cases occurring throughout Europe and the threat these pose to Scotland. The number of cases this year now exceeds 20,000, and whilst we have so far seen no re-emergence of disease in GB, we have seen a number of imported bluetongue cases in England and Wales. The continuing risk these imports pose, and the potentially significant implications they have for Scotland were highlighted in September, when 18 imported cattle in County Durham, close to the Scottish border, were found to have bluetongue. If virus had been found to be circulating in Durham, it would have led to bluetongue zones being imposed in Scotland. This would have led to trade difficulties and costs of movement restrictions associated with differing zones across Scotland. A Protection Zone in Scotland at that time would also have increased the risk of disease being imported, since under EU rules potentially infected animals from other Protection Zones could move here freely. The Group has concluded that, whilst we have been fortunate so far that no virus has been found circulating in UK this year, Scotland must vaccinate this winter to protect our livestock.

The situation in neighbouring countries in Europe shows how rapidly bluetongue can spread. The disease can cause huge damage, with a high mortality rate and long term problems such as infertility, resulting in large economic losses to animal keepers. Bluetongue can affect sheep, cattle and all other ruminants including goats and deer, as well as camelids such as llama and alpaca.

Contrary to rumours, there have been very few adverse reactions to the vaccine reported, and there is no evidence that vaccination affects fertility, causes abortions or has a detrimental impact on carcass quality in cattle or sheep. What is certain is that bluetongue is a devastating disease which can result in up to a 40% mortality rate in sheep, long-term reductions in yield from dairy cattle, and widespread abortions, calf malformations and weakly calves. This is why everyone in Scotland with bluetongue-susceptible livestock should vaccinate their animals.

2. Why we have waited until now

Vaccination is only permitted in a Protection Zone. Once part of a Protection Zone, Scotland is legally considered to be a high-risk area and is obliged to accept potentially infected animals from elsewhere within the Protection Zone, or from other zones of the same status. This increases the risk of diseased animals being brought to Scotland. Since Scotland has so far remained bluetongue-free, the Group chose not to vaccinate this summer.

However, we will shortly be entering the 'vector-free period' or 'midge-free period'. During this cold time of year the midges that carry bluetongue virus are less active, meaning that the risk of disease spread is low. My veterinary advisors have recommended that vaccination is best carried out at this time of year so that animals can develop immunity before next spring when the risk of disease spread increases.

3. What you need to know about the campaign

Full details of the vaccination campaign can be found in the 'Scottish Bluetongue Vaccination Campaign Plan', available on the Scottish Government Website at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/BTVvaccination>. The basic elements of the campaign are:

- **Vaccination is compulsory for cattle and sheep** over 3 months of age **except those on Shetland**, or those specifically exempted. This approach was taken at the

request of the Group as it will significantly reduce the risk of bluetongue spreading among domestic animals or becoming established in the midge population. Failure to vaccinate such animals may lead to a £5,000 fine or six months in jail.

- **Vaccination is voluntary for all other susceptible animals in Scotland**, including sheep and cattle on Shetland. Vaccination is strongly encouraged for all these animals.
- Where vaccination is compulsory, initial vaccination of cattle and sheep **must be completed between 03 November 2008 and 30 April 2009**, but you may choose the exact timing of the operation to suit your management practices.
- Vaccination may be carried out by you, as long as the animal is intended to remain within a BTV8 Protection Zone.
- **If animals are intended for export outside a BTV8 Protection Zone, vaccination must be conducted by a veterinary surgeon** for certification purposes. You are advised to discuss this with your vet prior to ordering vaccine.
- In order to maintain immunity, **annual revaccination is required for a number of years**, until an exit strategy is put in place.

4. The vaccine and how to obtain it

Scotland is vaccinating against BTV8, which is the most widespread virus in Europe, and the one found to be circulating in England last year. The Scottish Government has secured 12 million doses of the BTVPUR AISap 8 vaccine from Merial Animal Health Ltd. The Scottish Government placed this order to guarantee that supplies would be available for Scottish keepers, because a commercial market for bluetongue vaccine is only now developing.

The Scottish Government recognises the significant cost of vaccination to the industry, particularly in the first year when many animals will require 2 doses. The Scottish Government is therefore providing support of half of the manufacturing cost of the vaccine - over £2.6 million. This will keep costs down during the first vector-free period. Keepers will bear the remainder of the vaccine cost plus other delivery costs such as veterinary administration, and will bear the full costs in future years. This funding highlights our commitment to work in partnership with the industry to support a sustainable livestock sector.

To order vaccine you must use the BTV8 vaccine order form, which can be obtained from your vet. You must complete part one of the form and return to your vet who will either dispense the order or write a prescription for you to take to a veterinary pharmacy. The vet or pharmacist will return the order form to the Scottish Government when they give you the vaccine. This information will be used to monitor vaccine uptake and to ensure compliance.

The vaccine will primarily be sold in 100 ml bottles, and a supply of 50 ml bottles will be available at the end of the year. In order to satisfy the requirements of keepers of small numbers of animals, vets are permitted to decant the vaccine into smaller sterilized bottles or syringes upon request. You should ask your vet for further details. The price of the vaccine will range between approximately £44-£58 per 100 ml bottle. Note that only vaccine required for immediate use should be requested in each order, and that vaccine may only be held on-farm under refrigeration for a maximum of 35 days before use. You should take this into account when arranging a delivery date with your vet or pharmacist.

5. Co-ordinating vaccination with inspections

You will be aware that SGRPID Agricultural staff carry out an ongoing programme of Cattle and Sheep Identification Inspections and that you may be subject to such inspection at any time. I asked my officials to look at ways of reducing the inconvenience to farmers selected for these inspections. When you decide to vaccinate you may wish to inform your local SGRPID Area Office of the date that you plan to carry out the vaccination. This may enable staff to synchronise any visit planned with your vaccination activities, thus avoiding the need for an extra stock gathering. I must emphasise that advising SGRPID of the date of your bluetongue vaccination will not in any way influence whether you are selected for inspection.

6. How to Use the Vaccine

Enclosed with this letter is a bluetongue information leaflet that illustrates how to store and administer the vaccine and summarises the key details of the vaccination campaign. It also details which cattle and sheep are exempt from vaccination.

7. Animal Movements

The declaration of Scotland as a Protection Zone on Monday 3 November will allow generally unrestricted movement of animals within Great Britain and allow normal domestic trade to resume. The exception to this is a requirement for animals moving from Shetland to other parts of Scotland to be fully vaccinated before movement. Those buying sheep or cattle should ensure that they are vaccinated, either by administering vaccine on arrival in Scotland, or by obtaining evidence that they were vaccinated before arrival. Industry stakeholders, led by NFU Scotland and the Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland, have developed a self-declaration form to be used by those selling animals to confirm that the animals have been vaccinated. The form will shortly be available on the Scottish Government website, as well as on the websites of industry organisations. I strongly encourage those buying animals to ask for this documentary evidence of vaccination status, and all those selling animals to co-operate by filling in the self declaration.

Declaring the Protection Zone will also loosen the restrictions on trade with zones of the same status elsewhere in Europe. However, given the reasons and risks behind the decision to launch the vaccination campaign, I urge you to be responsible when sourcing stock by avoiding buying animals from known bluetongue affected areas. In addition to the continuing risk from BTV8, BTV1 is becoming an increasing worry in France. As vaccination against BTV8 provides no cross immunity for other strains of bluetongue, more than ever the onus is on individual animal keepers to prevent bluetongue being imported into Scotland.

8. Further Information

If you have questions about obtaining, storing or using the vaccine, I encourage you to contact your vet. For further information on the campaign consult the Scottish Government website at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/BTVvaccination> or your local Animal Health Office. **Information meetings will be held across Scotland in November and December – please look out for details of these in the farming press or the website.**

P.S. Please note that the agriculture census database has been used for the distribution of this letter. The census address details have been used solely for the purpose of this distribution under strictly controlled conditions agreed with the distributors, retaining confidentiality. If your address or any other details are incorrect, you should contact your local SGRPID Area Office to inform them of any necessary changes. If you have already completed a Land and Business Change Form (LBCF), you do not need to take any further action.