

Barren ewe check

Reproductive failure can have detrimental effects on a sheep farms profitability, whether this is down to an increased barren rate or an increase in abortions. Flock performance figures are important to help us identify key problem areas and allows us to act upon it. Abortion rates above 2%, a greater than expected number of barren ewes and weak or sickly lambs are all significant and could indicate an infectious problem.

The two main infectious causes of abortion in the UK are Enzootic Abortion and Toxoplasmosis. If you are concerned about the performance of your flock over this lambing season, then specific testing could be beneficial. Barren or aborting ewes can be blood tested to evaluate if there is an infectious cause. Luckily vaccines for Enzootic Abortion and Toxoplasmosis are highly effective at managing the impact of these infectious diseases. Please speak to one of the vets if this is something of concern for you, funding options are also available.



Post Movement TB testing in Wales

Post Movement TB testing regulations have been enforced in Wales for the last couple of years. One recent change to this legislation is that farmers will not be notified by APHA when, and which animals need testing. A few of you will have received letters through the post previously, but this service has now been stopped by the APHA.

Just as a reminder, all cattle need a Post Movement TB test, within the period 60-120 days after arrival on a holding, when they are moved into:

- the Low TB Area of Wales from:
 - an Intermediate TB Area or High TB Area in Wales
 - the Edge Area or High Risk Area of England
 - Northern Ireland
- an Intermediate TB Area of Wales from:
 - a High TB Area in Wales
 - the High Risk Area of England
 - Northern Ireland

Where a calf (under the age of 42 days) is purchased from a higher risk area into the Low or Intermediate TB Areas, the purchaser must PoMT the calf between 60 and 120 days after it moved on.



Crufts 2026

Keep an eye out for Nichol at Crufts this year, she will be taking part with Partee in the flyball competition on Friday 6th March with her team The Stormchasers!

Best of luck Nichol and Partee!

Bluetongue

Since July 2025 there have been 304 cases of bluetongue in Great Britain;

- England, there have been 282 cases of bluetongue - including 274 cases of only BTV-3, 1 case of only BTV-8 and 7 cases with both BTV-3 and BTV-8
- Wales, there have been 22 cases of BTV-3

The current vector season began back in July 2025 and we have seen continuous cases throughout the winter months. New cases were confirmed as recently as 24th February in Derbyshire. APHA recently conducted surveillance work in the area by randomly selecting farms to blood sample unvaccinated stock. The most recent results revealed that Bluetongue has been in the Wrexham area. Which leads to the question, what does the forecast look like for the 2026 high vector season?

The fact that we are still seeing new cases even in the colder months of the year suggests that this year will be similar to 2025 if not worse. The most significant development in early 2026 has been the impact of vertical transmission (mother to foetus). Many farmers who saw only mild symptoms in their cattle during the 2025 midge season are now seeing the true cost during calving and lambing.

- "Dummy" Calves & Lambs: Cases in Derbyshire, Shropshire, and Devon have highlighted a surge in newborns with neurological deformities. Symptoms include blindness, circling, an inability to suckle, and hydranencephaly (where the brain fails to develop, replaced by fluid).
- Infertility & Abortions: Significant drops in scanning rates have been reported. Some beef herds in the East of England have seen up to 20% of pregnancies lost or resulting in non-viable offspring.
- Differentiating from Schmallenberg (SBV): Because SBV is also midge-borne and causes similar deformities, we would urge you to test aborted foetuses to try and establish the causative virus. BTV-3 tends to cause more severe dummy behavior in newborns compared to the fixed-joint deformities more common in SBV.



What does Bluetongue look like?

Clinical signs can vary depending on species affected, animals may show little to no symptoms, ranging through to fatality.

Sheep

- Fever
- Swelling of the face and ears
- Oedema of the lungs, causing difficulty breathing
- Excessive salivation
- Ulceration of the lips and around the nose
- Lameness with inflammation at the junction of the skin and the coronary band
- Early embryonic losses, this would show up as a high percentage of barren ewes at scanning
- Death

Cattle

- Fever
- Lameness with inflammation at the junction of the skin and the coronary band
- Purulent nasal discharge
- Ulceration on the muzzle
- Excessive salivation
- Swollen teats
- Abortion

Please contact us on 01978 311444 if you have a large number of sheep or cattle presenting with lameness, fever, salivation, nasal discharge. Bluetongue is a notifiable disease, and early intervention can limit its spread.

Vaccination remains the best option to protect your livestock. Unvaccinated flocks have seen case mortality rates as high as 70%. In contrast, data from vaccinated flocks in Europe shows whole-flock mortality dropping to as low as 1-2%. Although cattle often show milder symptoms, the vaccine is vital for preventing silent losses. It reduces viraemia (the amount of virus in the blood), which significantly lowers the severity of clinical signs and limits the animal's role as a reservoir that infects more midges.

For more information on getting your livestock protected, please speak to one of our vets,

