



PUBLIC CAMPAIGN EDITION

Bluetongue (BTV-3): A National Plan to Protect British Livestock

A practical proposal for vaccination, surveillance, farmer support and a pathway towards disease freedom

Independent policy proposal - not Government or official veterinary guidance

Farmers are carrying the losses. Government must now provide a national plan proportionate to the threat.

The immediate request: Defra should convene an urgent national strategy meeting before December 2026 and publish a funded preparedness plan before the 2027 vector season.

Why this matters now

At 25 August 2026, Defra and APHA reported 630 confirmed bluetongue (BTV-3) premises in the UK during the 2026/27 season. A further 2,459 potential cases were under investigation after farms reported suspicious clinical signs. These figures are a dated snapshot and will continue to change.

- Farmers face mortality, reduced fertility, abortions, barren ewes, lost lambs, veterinary costs, extra labour and reduced productivity.
- Most current detections follow reports of visible clinical disease, rather than systematic testing of apparently healthy livestock.
- Vaccination is encouraged, but most of the financial and practical burden remains with individual livestock businesses.
- Monitoring the outbreak is necessary, but monitoring alone is not a national control strategy.

Central recommendation: Vaccinate the livestock population, monitor the midges, monitor the virus and its strains, educate farmers and use the combined evidence to progressively break the livestock-to-midge-to-livestock transmission cycle.

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The policy gap

Defra's current situation page continues to identify the Bluetongue Disease Control Framework for England as its control strategy. That framework was published specifically for the circumstances anticipated in 2024, when the principal aim was to contain or slow limited introductions until vaccines became available.

The position has now changed. Vaccines are available, England and Wales are country-wide restricted zones, infection has spread much more widely and APHA has described the testing demand as arising from the unprecedented scale of the outbreak. A refreshed national strategy is needed for the circumstances now facing British livestock farming.

Practical effect of the current approach: Individual farmers fund voluntary vaccination, monitor and report disease, and carry much of the mortality, reproductive and production loss. Government provides guidance, diagnostic testing of reported clinical cases, surveillance and selected movement controls.

Losses must be measured properly

Official Scottish Government guidance for highly susceptible sheep states: “Mortality rates average between 2–30%, but can be as high as 70%.” This is general bluetongue guidance; it is not an APHA estimate for the current UK BTV-3 outbreak and should not be presented as a forecast for every flock.

Official source: [Scottish Government — Bluetongue: clinical signs](#)

Reports received directly by Farming Solutions Ltd from affected sheep producers in Devon indicate that ewe mortality varies considerably between holdings. The level most commonly reported to us is approximately 5% to 10% of ewes, although individual farms have described both lower and higher losses. These are local, producer-reported observations; they have not been independently verified and must not be treated as a national average.

Local source note: direct reports from affected livestock keepers in Devon to Farming Solutions Ltd during the 2026 outbreak. Defra and APHA should collect and publish robust national mortality and reproductive-loss evidence.

Mortality alone may understate the full business impact. Reduced fertility, abortions, barren ewes and losses of lambs at or around lambing can damage flock output and breeding performance long after the immediate outbreak.

What Government should publish

- A national assessment of mortality, fertility, abortion, lamb and calf losses.
- The cost of treatment, veterinary work, labour, reduced productivity and disrupted trade.
- Vaccination coverage by county and livestock species.
- Testing volumes, waiting times, positive and negative results, and the basis for surveillance decisions.
- A cost-benefit comparison between supported prevention and repeated annual outbreaks.

Economic principle: Prevention should be judged against the full cost of allowing disease to circulate, not only against the immediate cost to Government.

The human and farming impact

Testimony from an affected Devon farm

“The impact of the bluetongue outbreak on our farm and across Devon, now spreading rapidly across the country, has been devastating and should not be underestimated. The virus swept through our flock, causing widespread illness, and significant losses. These were not isolated cases. Right across the county, farmers witnessed the disease spreading rapidly through their livestock, bringing with it considerable emotional and financial hardship as well as the severe impact on animal welfare.

On our own family farm, we have lost around 10% of our breeding ewes and two thirds of our rams. As a fifth-generation farmer, I have experienced many challenges in agriculture, but my father, who is now 80 years old and has spent his entire life farming, tells me that this has been the worst month he has ever known. That is a remarkable and sobering reflection of the severity of this outbreak.

By the time many of us understood the scale of what was happening, it was already too late. The disease had taken hold and the consequences were being felt across farming communities throughout Devon. There are many lessons to be learned.

We cannot allow this to be repeated in future years. As changing climatic conditions continue to increase the risk of vector-borne diseases, a coordinated national response is essential. Government, industry, scientists and farmers must work together to deliver a long-term bluetongue strategy that includes improved surveillance, disease preparedness, early warnings, practical support for affected farms and a funded vaccination programme. We owe it to our livestock, our farming families and future generations to ensure that this never happens again.”

Cheryl Cottle-Hunkin, fifth-generation farmer and Devon County Council Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs and Broadband. Statement supplied for inclusion in this proposal. [Official council profile](#)

Further testimony from North Devon

“Bluetongue has hit North Devon and Mid Devon extremely hard. Reports of the virus being on Exmoor started in the middle of July; within a week it was in North Devon and then continued to spread across the county. The local fallen-stock company has reportedly been sending an artic trailer a day for rendering when it would usually send one a week. Unfortunately, losses have been high, placing further financial and mental-health pressures on farmers who have also been contending with the drought.

Sheep seem to have been hit hardest by the virus. Cattle have also been affected, but we will not know the full impact until pregnancy detection starts in the autumn and calving takes place next spring.

We started vaccinating in early August and, to date, none of the vaccinated stock has shown symptoms. Our experience suggests that vaccination is working, and I urge anybody who has not vaccinated to consider doing so because the cost of vaccination is outweighed by the cost of losing or treating an animal that contracts the virus.”

Richard White, farmer, North Devon. Statement supplied for inclusion in this proposal. The fallen-stock volumes and apparent outcome in vaccinated animals are the producer's reported observations and have not been independently verified or presented as a controlled assessment of vaccine effectiveness.

What other European countries have done

There is no single EU-wide BTV-3 policy. Member states have adopted different combinations of vaccination, surveillance, movement controls and financial support. The examples below are dated policy comparators rather than a claim that every measure can be transferred directly to Great Britain.

France: vaccine procurement and financial intervention

- Ordered BTV-3 vaccine on 5 July 2024, before confirming its first BTV-3 outbreak on 5 August.
- Announced 6.4 million free state-supplied doses in August 2024 and had ordered 11.7 million doses by 9 October. Free BTV-3 vaccine was made available for sheep throughout metropolitan France and for cattle within the designated vaccination zone.
- Established an emergency compensation package of up to €75 million covering eligible excess mortality, including BTV-3 losses on confirmed sheep, cattle and goat holdings during 2024.

Official sources: [French vaccination launch](#) | [vaccination instructions](#) | [compensation decision](#)

Belgium: targets, compulsory vaccination and recorded coverage

Belgium organised compulsory BTV-3 and BTV-8 vaccination for sheep and cattle during 2025 and required vaccination records to be entered in its central Sanitel database. Its official scientific committee had recommended completing vaccination before vector activity, aiming for at least 70% effective population immunity, recording coverage geographically, strengthening diagnostics and sequencing a proportion of positive samples.

Official sources: [Belgian disease-control page](#) | [Belgian scientific opinion](#)

Germany: extensive campaigns followed by fewer outbreaks

Germany's Federal Research Institute for Animal Health reports that, after explosive BTV-3 spread in 2024, the situation calmed considerably in 2025 and detections during the 2025/26 midge year were significantly reduced. It attributes this to both natural infection and extensive vaccination campaigns, so the reduction cannot be credited to vaccination alone.

Official source: [Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut — Bluetongue disease](#)

Netherlands: voluntary vaccination with structured surveillance

The Netherlands permits voluntary BTV-3 vaccination and states that affected businesses bear their own costs. However, it divides the country into 20 surveillance regions, uses regional veterinary practices to sample clinically affected animals and monitors which serotype is present. This illustrates that European intervention is not uniform, while also providing a model of structured regional surveillance.

Official source: [Netherlands Government — approach to bluetongue](#)

Relevance to this proposal: European policy is not uniform, but these examples show that governments can set measurable vaccination targets, record coverage, purchase vaccines, operate structured regional surveillance and support eligible losses. Defra should publish the evidence explaining why its chosen level of intervention is proportionate to the present threat.

The proposed national plan

ACTION	WHAT IT MEANS
1. Vaccinate	Secure vaccine supply, support vaccine and administration costs, prioritise breeding livestock and publish coverage targets.
2. Monitor midges	Create a coordinated Culicoides trapping network covering outbreak areas, likely routes of spread and currently unaffected areas.
3. Track the virus	Sequence virus from significant livestock cases and, where practical, infected midges to identify lineages and new introductions.
4. Test strategically	Add targeted surveillance of apparently healthy cattle and sheep, including previously affected eastern counties.
5. Warn farmers early	Combine disease, vector, weather, vaccination and genomic information in a clear public dashboard.
6. Educate	Run one coordinated pre-season campaign through vets, markets, farming bodies, shows, merchants and agricultural media.
7. Support losses	Assess targeted assistance for holdings suffering serious mortality and reproductive damage.
8. Measure progress	Publish annual targets, independent review and a credible pathway towards recognised disease-free status.

Delivery timetable

- Autumn/winter 2026: agree leadership, funding, vaccine procurement, surveillance design and the 2027 preparedness plan.
- Before spring 2027: begin vaccination early enough to build protection before significant midge activity.
- 2027 vector season: publish coverage, surveillance and genomic evidence and respond rapidly to emerging clusters.
- Annually: independently assess transmission, losses and progress towards suppression and disease freedom.

The geographical pattern requires explanation

If renewed 2026 transmission is principally the result of overwintering in infected animals or local midge populations, some re-emergence would reasonably be expected in the eastern and south-eastern counties most affected previously. A small number of cases has appeared farther east, including Norfolk, but the overwhelming clinical concentration has been in South West England.

This does not prove that any particular explanation is wrong. Vaccination, previous exposure, livestock species, clinical presentation and testing intensity may all affect where disease is detected. However, an absence of reported clinical cases cannot automatically be treated as evidence that infection is absent.

Evidence needed

- Targeted blood testing of apparently healthy cattle and sheep in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Kent.
- Regional vaccination and previous-exposure data.
- Genomic comparisons between South West cases and earlier infections.
- Livestock movement, breeding history, vector-surveillance and meteorological evidence.
- An assessment of whether cases represent one continuing transmission chain, several sources or a combination.

Question for Defra: If animal-associated persistence or local overwintering is responsible for renewed transmission, why has there not been a clearer re-emergence in the former eastern and south-eastern focus, and what evidence explains the present concentration in South West England?

Questions MPs should ask

1. Will Defra hold a national bluetongue strategy meeting before December 2026?
2. Will Government publish a funded vaccination and surveillance plan before the 2027 vector season?
3. What vaccination coverage is needed to reduce transmission, and how will it be achieved?
4. Will Defra commission an independent economic and reproductive-loss assessment?
5. What evidence supports the official explanation of the 2026 geographical pattern?
6. What is the long-term objective and route towards restoring disease-free status?

Farmers: help move this proposal up the chain

This proposal has been sent to MPs, the British Veterinary Association and the Animal and Plant Health Agency, and responses have begun to come back. Wider farmer participation is now needed to demonstrate that this is a national industry concern.

Please take these steps

- Send this document to your constituency MP.
- Include your name, farm postcode and constituency.
- Briefly explain how bluetongue is affecting your farm, customers or local area.
- Ask for a written response and request that the issue is raised with the Secretary of State for Defra.
- Copy in your farming union, livestock organisation and veterinary practice.
- Share the proposal with county farming groups, livestock groups, markets and agricultural businesses.
- Send relevant responses to Farming Solutions Ltd so progress can be reported publicly.

Find your MP: members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP

The message: Monitoring the outbreak is not enough. British agriculture needs a properly funded national plan to control bluetongue and reduce the burden being carried by farmers.

Public information and updates

[Farming Solutions Ltd - campaign updates](#)

[Defra and APHA - latest bluetongue situation](#)

[Scottish Government - Bluetongue: clinical signs](#)

[Defra and APHA - How to spot and report bluetongue](#)

[Defra - Bluetongue Disease Control Framework in England](#)

[WOAH - bluetongue disease information](#)

Publication note

This is an independent policy proposal and public campaign document. It is not veterinary advice and does not replace current Government rules or advice from a private veterinary surgeon. Outbreak figures are dated 25 August 2026 and should be checked against the latest official figures when quoted. Final vaccination targets, programme costs and disease-control measures must be determined through scientific, veterinary, economic and industry assessment.

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