

24 March 2026

Dear Stakeholder,

Ministerial update on the bluetongue virus (BTV) control strategy in Scotland for 2026

Since bluetongue virus arrived in England for the first time in 2023, BTV-3 has spread to all parts of the UK except Scotland, partly due to geography and weather, but also because conditions imposed on livestock movements prevented introduction of infection here in Scotland.

We recognise that control measures may impact businesses that rely on cross-border trade. However, the Scottish Government and many stakeholders are very concerned about the impacts of any disease incursion into Scotland. We know that BTV-3 can have many impacts upon animal health and welfare, including significant fertility problems and mortality. Many of these are impacts being felt in England. As a government, we must do all we can to reduce the risk of disease incursion to protect our nations herds and flocks.

Vaccination is the best insurance against BTV. It can prevent disease altogether or at least reduce the most serious effects in those animals that are vaccinated. It is not mandatory, but as a minimum we strongly encourage every cattle or sheep farmer (and indeed any keeper of deer, alpacas or other susceptible species) to seriously consider vaccination and get advice from their private vet.

This disease may well eventually enter Scotland, but we can implement controls to help reduce the risk of the virus arriving.

I listened to all the concerns of key industry representatives before determining our control strategy for the rest of 2026 and I think that, on balance and for now, the best way forward is to attempt to remain BTV-free in Scotland for as long as possible.

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Therefore, between 01 June and 09 September 2026:

- animals moving to Scotland to live must have their disease status confirmed by means of a PCR test with negative results received prior to movement.
- cattle fully vaccinated with Bultavo-3 are exempt from PCR testing.
- animals from Scotland attending a show or sale in a Restricted Zone can return to Scotland without a test, as long as they spend no longer than four days in the zone.
- slaughterhouses must be designated, and movements direct to abattoir premises after leaving a Restricted Zone.

The dates for the 2026 high-risk season are based on historic temperatures, striking a balance between reducing risk and maximising planning time for the industry. If autumn is unusually warm, we may have to retain full controls for longer.

I thank industry for their constructive engagement with my officials.

Yours sincerely,



JIM FAIRLIE

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