

January 2008

Questions and Answers on bluetongue vaccination

What is Bluetongue?

Bluetongue is a non-contagious, insect-transmitted, viral disease of domestic and wild ruminants. At present 24 serotypes of the virus are recognised. The virulence and mortality rate of the different virus strains vary considerably depending also on the infected species.

What are the advantages of vaccinating against bluetongue?

Vaccination is regarded as one of the most effective ways of controlling and eventually eradicating bluetongue disease in affected areas. It reduces clinical signs in affected animals resulting in lower mortality and reduced economical losses, and it prevents the spread of the disease amongst livestock.

What are the different vaccine options?

Vaccines against bluetongue can either be inactivated vaccines or modified live virus (MLV) vaccines. Inactivated vaccines, when administered in two separate doses, are able to fully protect animals for a long period. Modified live vaccines generate protective immunity after a single inoculation, and they have been proven effective in preventing clinical BT in the areas where they are used

Can Member States use vaccination against bluetongue?

Under EU legislation, Member States can apply vaccination as a control measure against bluetongue. Member States that wish to carry out a bluetongue vaccination campaign must inform the Commission.

What measures are set out for bluetongue vaccination in EU legislation?

In October 2007, Regulation (EC) No 1266/2007 was adopted, setting out more harmonised measures for the monitoring and control of bluetongue. Under this Regulation, clear conditions are set out for the movement of animals from bluetongue infected areas, including those which have been vaccinated against the disease. The Regulation clarifies the requirements for vaccinated animals and therefore makes intra-community trade of vaccinated animals more feasible.

Animals vaccinated against bluetongue can only be moved if they meet certain conditions established in Annex III of Regulation (EC) No 1266/2007. These conditions ensure that vaccinated animals are not viraemic (i.e. that there is no virus in the bloodstream) and have already developed a sufficient immune protection before being moved outside the protection zone.

Is there financial support for bluetongue vaccination?

EU co-funding may be provided to cover certain costs of vaccination, not only in emergency situations but also for long-term surveillance and control activities and when vaccination is used with to eradicate bluetongue.

Has vaccination against bluetongue already been carried out in the EU, and what were the results?

Bluetongue vaccination has been successfully used in a number of European countries which have been affected by the disease. Italy, Spain, France and Portugal have all used vaccination as a means of controlling and eradicating outbreaks of the bluetongue virus.

Why has vaccination not been carried out in all affected Member States so far?

For certain strains of the bluetongue virus, including BTV8 which has caused the outbreaks in Northern Europe, no vaccine has been available up to now. However, the Commission has had close contacts with the industry on this issue, and several producers have developed or are currently developing a vaccine which could be used against BTV8.

Can vaccinated animals still carry the bluetongue virus?

Vaccination does not immediately protect the animal from infection if there is a virus circulating. When the vaccines are administered to uninfected animals, the onset of a protection is observed only after a certain period, depending on the biological properties of the vaccines. For this reason, EU legislation lays down movement restrictions and/or controls for vaccinated animals to ensure that they do not contribute to the spread of the disease.

Can vaccinated animals be distinguished from naturally infected animals?

No strategy is currently available to distinguish vaccinated from infected animals on the basis of serology. However, PCR techniques which can distinguish vaccines from field viruses have been established and successfully used.

Are meat and milk products from infected or vaccinated animals safe to eat, and do they have to be labelled as such?

Bluetongue does not affect humans, and there is no risk of the disease being contracted or spread through meat or milk. The vaccination of animals against bluetongue has no impact on their products. Therefore, there is no reason why labelling requirements should be introduced for meat and milk from bluetongue-vaccinated animals.

What are the trade implications (both intra-EU and vis a vis third countries) of vaccination?

Regulation (EC) No 1266/2007 brings EU rules with regard to the movement of animals vaccinated against bluetongue more into line with those of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Both the EU and OIE accept vaccination as an effective way of controlling bluetongue and vaccinated animals are considered safe for trade if certain provisions (see above) are complied with.

More information on vaccination against bluetongue can be found on the DG Health and Consumer Protection website:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/controlmeasures/bluetongue_en.htm