

Defra Briefing Note for stakeholders (Livestock Core Group)

Temporary easing of pre-movement BTV-3 testing for non-breeding livestock in England

What's changing?

From 26 March non-breeding cattle, goats, sheep and camelids over the age of 60 days will be able to move out from the Restricted Zone (RZ) without a pre-movement test. A specific movement licence for each animal will still be required.

Only the following animals will still require both a pre-movement test and a specific movement licence to move out of the RZ:

- Entire males intended for use in breeding
- Pregnant females (or pregnancy status unknown)
- youngstock that are aged 60 days or younger at the time of the movement, unless they are travelling at foot with the maternal dam - in this case, you can test the maternal dam by PCR and ELISA

This is a temporary change that will apply until 23 April 2025, although the end date could be shorter depending on evidence that the risk of bluetongue virus transmission has increased.

Why are we making this change?

We are currently in the Seasonally Vector Low Period (SVLP), which started on 30 December 2024. During the SVLP the risk of transmission of bluetongue is very low as biting midges are not active, however previously infected breeding animals can still pass on the virus to their offspring during this time.

The World organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) advises that animals that have been infected with bluetongue are not likely to be infectious after 60 days. The SVLP began more than 60 days ago therefore we consider the risk of moving non-breeding animals now to be very low.

What do I need to do now?

Animal Keepers –If you are considering moving your animals out of the RZ to live between 26 March and 23 April you will still need to apply for a specific licence. If the animals are breeding animals, or were born within the last 60 days, you will also need to apply for a pre-movement test. Further details can be found here [Bluetongue movement licences and designated slaughterhouses - GOV.UK](#)

Animal keepers should continue to monitor their animals frequently for clinical signs of bluetongue and report suspicion of disease immediately, they should also make sure

their animals and land are registered with APHA so keepers can be kept informed and animals easily located.

Vets – You will need to familiarise yourself with the change in requirements and be able to communicate this to your clients. Please see [Bluetongue news, information and guidance for livestock keepers - 24.03.25.docx](#)

Q&A

How long will this change apply for?

We expect to allow non-breeding animals to move without a pre-movement test until 23 April 2025, however this date may change if we become aware of an earlier increase in the risk of bluetongue virus transmission.

Why are you changing this now?

The risk of bluetongue virus transmission from midges has been minimal for the last 60 days. Testing of low risk animals is now of limited value and places pressures on keepers, vets, laboratories and government agencies.

What happens if the Seasonally Vector Low Period (SVLP) ends before 23 April?

Once sufficient adult midge activity is detected at the level that signals the end of the SVLP, there follows a further period of low risk of bluetongue virus transmission via vectors until the weather becomes consistently warm enough for midges infected with bluetongue to become infectious and pass it on to animals through biting (typically this happens by around mid-May). At the point of the SVLP ending a decision will be taken on which bluetongue controls may need to change, and which can continue.

I can see midges around my animals now, why is this not seen as risky for the spread of bluetongue?

Only one type of midge can transmit bluetongue – ‘Culicoides’. Currently the weather is not warm enough for adult Culicoides midges to be actively biting animals or to become infectious with bluetongue. Adult Culicoides midges usually become active in April. By mid-May, temperatures are usually suitable for midges to become infectious and spread bluetongue.

I have already applied for a movement licence and had pre-movement samples taken, do I still have to wait for the lab results before I can move my animals?

You can only move your animals if there is a valid movement licence in place. If you applied for your movement licence and it states that a pre-movement test is required, then you will need to wait for the results before moving your animals.

I still want to have all my animals tested, can this be done?

From 26 March to 23 April 2025 the requirement for mandatory pre-movement testing applies to:

- Entire males intended for use in breeding
- Pregnant females (or pregnancy status unknown)
- youngstock that are aged 60 days or younger at the time of the movement, unless they are travelling at foot with the maternal dam - in this case, you can test the maternal dam by PCR and ELISA

If a keeper wishes to test animals which don't fall into these categories the additional samples and tests will need to be paid for privately.

I have already applied for a movement licence now in the exempt category and the sampling or testing has not been done yet – do I still need to have all my animals tested?

Licences awaiting pre-movement sampling or testing already booked will continue up until 31 March. If you have a test booked on or after 31 March you will need to contact the licencing team on the application portal to confirm that the animals listed are now exempt from pre-movement testing. Your application will be progressed once this information is received.

What if I want to move a young bull for feeding and slaughter?

As long as the bull is over 60 days old at the time of the move and is intended for feeding prior to slaughter it can be moved with a specific licence and without a pre-movement test. If moving direct to slaughter it can move without testing subject to complying with the requirements of general licence EXD634.

What if I'm not sure if my animal is pregnant

It is the keeper's responsibility to declare that the animal is not pregnant. If the status is unknown the keeper should commission a pregnancy diagnosis (PD) test or scan from a veterinarian to confirm the animal is not pregnant and this should be retained as evidence. If you cannot attest that the animal is not pregnant they must be pre-movement tested.

Why do entire males still need a pre-movement test but not female animals that can be bred from?

Bluetongue virus can be shed in the semen of infected bulls, therefore we are taking a precautionary approach in restricting movement of entire males intended for use in breeding until the animal is shown to be PCR negative.

Where can I find information on which type of licence to apply for? Follow this link - [Bluetongue movement licences and designated slaughterhouses - GOV.UK](#)