

August 2026 Newsletter

New Government TB strategy

The government has released the “Bovine TB Control for England” strategy with the aim of year-on-year reductions in TB incidence in cattle such that England is “officially Bovine-TB Free” by 2038. To qualify, according to the WOA, 99.8% of herds and 99.9% of individuals in England must be shown to be free of TB for a period of 3 years. The herd incidence in cattle herds in England from May 2025 to April 2026 was 6.6%, this needs to reduce to 0.02%.



The overall approach is to focus on cattle to cattle transmission but to manage other farmed species and wildlife “where they pose a clear risk to cattle”. Also, part of the overall approach is to “learn by doing” with new approaches to be trialled and then scaled up if found to be successful.

The main areas of proposed action include stronger cattle-focused control such as more effective use of testing, access to herd risk information for better trading decisions, stronger management of cattle with a high disease risk and improved biosecurity. Cattle vaccination is to be introduced by 2030 using the human BCG TB vaccine. When cattle were exposed to TB after vaccination, 30% did not develop the disease (no culture or lesions), 30% had partial protection (reduced disease) and around 40% of cattle were unprotected. There is no claim that the vaccine prevents infection, just that it decreases the overall severity of infection. Alongside vaccination, a new Detect Infected Among Vaccinated Animals (DIVA) test will be introduced because the standard skin test currently used will be of no use. In naturally infected animals, the DIVA test performs similarly to the current skin test in that the number of false positives is very low but the number of false negatives will still be disappointingly high.

Whilst wildlife control was mentioned at a recent TB open meeting at Sedgemoor market, it was made clear by Tom Handley, Head of Wildlife Policy for Defra, that there was minimal political appetite for wildlife control. Badger vaccination delivery is to be increased with yearly vaccinations for 4 years where a licence is granted. Vaccination of badgers is not a “cure” for already infected animals but it is hoped that infected badgers will die off during the period of vaccinating, leaving a majority uninfected and immune. The cost of each dose of badger vaccine is around £26/animal with a state delivered deployment “whole cost” estimate of £700 to £825 per badger. However, various “volunteer” groups have managed to keep the costs down to £82 per badger per year. Whilst it has been shown that vaccination reduces transmission of TB between badgers, no peer reviewed research has shown badger vaccination reduces TB incidence in cattle. The subject of deer was brought up at the meeting but there are no specific proposals for deer despite anecdotal reports of high infection rates in deer.

High risk cattle movements and biosecurity were viewed as significant factors in TB incidence with plans being developed to give farmers greater access to information on the disease risk of cattle before purchase. There are also other tests, such as the Enferplex blood test for TB which can be used on a private basis. The Enferplex test is reasonably sensitive and specific, particularly if used around 30 days after a skin test but, if we vaccinate, the skin test will not be able to be used as the majority of animals will show a positive reaction.

A more local, flexible approach to TB control is to be welcomed as is a focus on biosecurity and better risk assessment tools for cattle purchases. However, it seems that even in vaccinated herds, 40% of cattle may be unprotected and if TB is circulating in the local wildlife population vaccination of the wildlife will be necessary in addition to the cattle. Who is going to have to pay for this? Ultimately, although we have concerns we should engage with this process and do our best to make it to work.

Sheep Dung samples for FWEC

Please note that sheep dung samples can be dropped in to either Ilminster branch or Yarcombe branch on a Wednesday for 24 hour testing. Samples can be dropped off any day but won't get tested until they get to Bridgwater where our machine is.

Otherwise you can drop off the sample to Bridgwater any day directly.



Haemonchus Contortus Worms

Over the past month, we've seen increasing numbers of cases of *Haemonchus contortus* (Barber's Pole) worm causing sudden death in adult sheep. Unlike most worms, this parasite doesn't often cause diarrhoea. Instead, it feeds on blood in the animal's abomasum.

Both the larval and adult stages of the worm's life cycle cause disease, so we often see clinical signs before worm egg counts increase. Sudden death can be the first clinical indicator, along with anaemia and lethargy. We can diagnose the worm on post-mortem examination, as the worms are visible to the human eye. Once the adults are producing eggs, our Ovacyte machine can carry out additional speciation of the worm eggs.



First Aid Course

We're excited to be hosting an Emergency First Aid at Work course, with members of our own team also taking part to refresh and strengthen their skills.

This essential training is a great opportunity to build confidence and practical skills to respond effectively in workplace emergencies.

Whether you are refreshing your knowledge or completing certification for the first time, this course is designed to be engaging, hands on, and highly valuable.

Spaces are limited, to secure your place please call us on **01278 663399 - £75+ VAT**



FarmVets
SOUTHWEST

EMERGENCY FIRST AID AT WORK

Did you know some of the most common workplace injuries, especially on farm include:

-  **Crush injuries (tractors/cattle)**
-  **Slips and trips**
-  **Falls, especially from a height**
-  **Lacerations**
-  **Bleeding**

We are hosting an Emergency First Aid at work course -
Why not join some of the FarmVets team who will be taking part and refreshing their first aid skills!

-  **1 Day Training**
-  **Certificate - Valid for 3 Years**
-  **Fully Accredited**

Wednesday 16th September
8:45am for 9am start
North Newton Church Rooms
TA7 0BG
(Includes light lunch)

Book Now:
01278 663399
£75+ VAT
(limited spaces)

Accidents can happen in an instant. Your first aid skills could save a life!

Bluetongue Update

This past month, we have seen our first cases of the 2026/27 vector season (since 1st of July 2026), with BTV-3 (Bluetongue virus serotype 3) diagnosed across the country. The virus is spread by midges and can affect sheep, cattle, goats, and deer. Bluetongue is a notifiable disease, and we are legally required to report suspected cases. There is government funding available for the diagnostic testing of up to three animals.

Clinical signs to watch out for in both sheep and cattle include:

- Abortion, foetal deformities, and stillbirths
- Discharge from the eyes
- Drooling from the mouth
- Ulcers/sores around the nose, mouth, and teats
- Fever
- Lameness
- Lethargy
- Reduced milk yield
- Loss of appetite



In the practice, we saw a few cases during the 2025/26 season, most recently a calf born with signs of having been infected in utero.

Signs in calves include:

- Calves born small or weak
- Poor mobility – a wide-based stance, difficulty standing, or a noticeable lack of suck reflex
- Neurological signs such as blindness, circling, and head pressing
- Abortion or stillbirth

Calves born infected act as a reservoir for the virus. Midges that bite infected calves can then transmit the virus to other animals they subsequently bite. Peak midge populations occur during late summer and autumn, so we are now heading into the time of year when Bluetongue is most commonly seen. The midges can be carried over very large distances on the wind (more than 200 km), and this has been the primary way Bluetongue serotypes are introduced into new areas.

Vaccination is the only way to provide a long-term option for disease control. If you are considering using the BTV vaccine or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact any of our branches and speak to a vet.