



FEDERATION OF VETERINARIANS OF EUROPE

Press Release

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FVE concerned about weak British bluetongue control programme

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The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) has voiced its concern about the way the UK intends to protect its cattle and sheep against bluetongue. "*The British plans fail to guarantee an optimal protection of the animals against the disease, while opportunities to limit further spread of the disease remain untapped*", regretted Walter Winding, FVE president. Furthermore, "*the use of a provisionally licensed vaccine without any form of pharmacovigilance clearly carries additional risks for animal health and welfare.*"

In the UK, vaccination of susceptible animals against bluetongue will be completely voluntary and farmers will have to bear all costs. All animal owners will have to decide whether to vaccinate some (or all) of their animals – or not. If opting for vaccination, they need to contact their veterinarian for a prescription, buy the vaccine and ensure that it is properly administered to the animals.

In the end, it will be unclear what percentage of the animal population was vaccinated, when the animals were vaccinated, and if this was carried out correctly (primary injection a few weeks later followed by a booster injection). "*It would seem unlikely that this would lead to a reliable overview of vaccination coverage, never mind export certification*", Dr Winding added.

If animal owners decide not to vaccinate, their animals run the risk of contracting the disease with all the consequences for their health and welfare. Additional problems will occur if animals that were believed vaccinated become sick. Were they really vaccinated, was the vaccine properly used, was there a vaccine breakdown?

In case of suspected adverse effects of vaccination, who will be able to tell if they were really related to the vaccination or if it was just a co-incidence? Especially since only provisionally licensed vaccines will be used – which have not undergone the more rigorous evaluation procedures of regular vaccines – proper monitoring is of the utmost importance.

In contrast to other countries, the UK decided to follow a vaccination strategy not approved by the EU Commission. In doing so, the country cannot benefit from the possibilities of EU co-financing. Countries that opt for co-financing have to meet certain criteria to ensure the Commission that EU funds are used in a proper way.

According to the FVE President, the UK approach "*was probably driven by a strong desire to cut costs, and has little to do with animal health and welfare*". Possibilities to limit further spread of the disease to free areas, such as Scotland and the Irish Republic, remain unexploited. "*Irrespective of the disease outbreaks the UK has faced over recent years, it continues to cut budgets and to reduce its Animal Health Services, something that goes completely against the new EU Community Animal Health Strategy, which focuses on prevention rather than cure*".

Notes for Editors:

1. Bluetongue is a viral disease of domestic and wild ruminants, and it transmitted by midges. It causes severe suffering and even death among affected animals. It also leads to a huge economic loss, due to the reduced food uptake, and loss of milk and meat production.
2. The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is an umbrella organisation of 43 veterinary organisations from 36 European countries, representing a total of around 200 000 veterinarians.
3. For further information, consult the fve website <http://www.fve.org> or contact the FVE Secretariat on tel +32 2 533 70 20 or by e-mail to info@fve.org

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