

Consultation on Phase 6 of Scotland's Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) Eradication Scheme

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Introduction

Since 2010, the Scottish Government has been working with industry, veterinary practitioners and scientific partners to eradicate bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) in Scotland. Our joint BVD Advisory Group has been working to eradicate BVD in Scotland in a way that suits the distinctive nature of Scottish farming.

BVD is one of the most important cattle diseases for economics, productivity and welfare. Eradicating BVD will help meet Scotland's commitment to a Fairer Scotland and Net Zero by making Scotland's cattle businesses more profitable and sustainable. Scottish Government analysis has shown that by eradicating BVD the average Scottish farm benefits by £2,000 - £14,000 annually (£20 - £70 per cow per year) depending on farm type¹. By avoiding the need to treat both persistently and transiently infected animals we also reduce our reliance on antibiotics and aid the global effort to combat antimicrobial resistance.

Since Scotland's BVD eradication scheme was introduced in 2010, the level of BVD exposure in Scottish breeding herds has reduced from 40% to 9%². This is due to the great efforts of cattle keepers and their vets to test, identify and remove sources of BVD infection in the Scottish breeding herd.

To move Scotland closer to BVD eradication, the BVD Advisory Group have agreed that we should introduce new measures in to the scheme. These include updating how Check Tests are carried out, bolstering the Compulsory BVD Investigation and increasing obligations for non-breeding herds.

We welcome your views on these proposals.

This consultation will run from 15 November 2023 to 7 February 2024.

Background

BVD virus causes a complex of diseases in cattle, the most important of which can interfere with reproduction, affect the unborn calf and ultimately lead to fatal mucosal disease. Transient BVD virus infection causes significant suppression of the immune system, leading to outbreaks of other disease such as pneumonia and scours.

The virus is mainly spread by Persistently Infected (PI) cattle. These animals are infected as calves in the uterus during the first 120 days of pregnancy. At this stage, the unborn calf's developing immune system does not recognise the BVD virus as

1 [Scottish Government Publication - Eradicating BVD: estimating the savings to farmers](#)

2 [Epic Scotland - BVD monthly summary report](#)

"foreign", so does not produce antibodies. Instead the animal becomes Persistently Infected. PIs remain infected with BVD all their lives and they continuously shed large quantities of virus, infecting any unprotected cattle around them. Many die as calves but some live much longer and some PI animals can appear normal. If a PI gives birth to a live calf, it will also be a PI. Removing PI cattle from the national herd is critical to any eradication attempt.

Cattle that are otherwise healthy (non-PIs) can become infected with BVD virus at any point in their lives, which is known as transient infection. They will produce an antibody response to the virus and normally fight it off in 2-3 weeks. They will then have antibodies in their blood and tissue, which persist for years..

An animal infected with BVD virus has virus in its blood and tissue. This applies to both PI animals and those that are transiently infected. There is a range of reliable, commercially available tests for BVD virus and antibody.

If an animal gives a positive result to its first virus test, it is a suspect PI. A second sample taken at least three weeks later will either confirm that the animal is a PI, or if virus is no longer present, will show that the animal was transiently infected with BVD at the time of the first test.

As a consequence, testing for BVD virus is simple but interpreting the results can be complicated. If an animal tests positive for viral antigen, it may be a PI animal or it may be transiently infected. If it has antibodies it has been exposed to infection, is still benefiting from its mother's colostrum or has been recently vaccinated, and is very unlikely be a PI animal. Understanding test results is vital to controlling the disease.

For more information on BVD, please see www.scotland.gov.uk/bvd.

Scotland's BVD Eradication Scheme

Through the BVD Advisory Group, Scotland's BVD eradication scheme has been developed by the cattle industry in Scotland with Government backing through [legislation](#).

Scotland's scheme puts the responsibility and power in the hands of farmers to reduce the number of PI calves being born in or moving through their herds. The intention is to encourage farmers to eliminate BVD from their own herds and help them to avoid bringing infected cattle in to their herds. Those who choose not to comply are inconvenienced by trading disadvantages, movement restrictions and biosecurity controls.

The scheme's guiding principles are:

- Industry-led. The scheme has been developed to reflect the needs of the cattle industry. The BVD Advisory Group makes sure that we do not act against the wishes of the industry. The cattle industry benefits directly from BVD eradication and bears some of the costs.
- Flexible. The eradication scheme has a range of testing options to accommodate all types of cattle keepers.

- Phased approach. Early phases emphasised collaboration and encouragement, later phases have introduced disincentives for poor compliance.

Over the course of the eradication scheme, legislation has required keepers of breeding herds to screen their cattle regularly for BVD (every seven months for dairy breeding herds, and every 13 months for other breeding herds) and has introduced control measures based on the result of the screening test. There is a requirement to test all calves born on non-breeding holdings and a prohibition on moving PIs and suspect PIs anywhere other than direct to slaughter (or under licence granted by a veterinary inspector or the Scottish Ministers). Phase 5 of the scheme introduced movement restrictions for not negative BVD herds and high risk animals without an individual BVD status, as well as Compulsory BVD Investigations for herds that have been Not Negative continuously for 15 months. The legislation governing the scheme is the [Bovine Viral Diarrhoea \(Scotland\) Order 2019](#).

Proposals for Phase 6

Through the BVD Advisory Group, we have agreed to consult on the following proposals for the next phase of the eradication scheme that would:

1. Introduce minimum proportion testing for the BVD Check Test
2. Reduce the Compulsory BVD Investigation (CBI) compliance period
3. Introduce veterinary certification after CBI
4. Increase the consequences of CBI non-compliance
5. Incorporate BVD compliance in to single farm payments
6. Increase testing for calves of animals purchased in-calf (“Trojan cows”)
7. Delay BVD Positive herd restrictions
8. Continue no compulsory slaughter of PIs
9. Introduce more obligations for Non-Breeding herds

We would welcome views on the following proposals to ensure improvements to the eradication scheme are practical, enforceable and not counter-productive.

Proposal 1: Introducing minimum proportion testing for BVD Check Test

When testing for BVD, keepers have the option to use a BVD Check Test. This testing method uses blood samples from representative young stock (usually homebred animals that are 9-18 months old) to determine if the herd has been exposed to BVD. The current legislation requires at least 5 animals per managed group to be sampled in such herds. A managed group consists of animals that graze or are housed together for two months or more, and close enough together with others in the group to allow the BVD virus to circulate. For keepers of dairy breeding herds the BVD check test requires the sampling of at least 10 calves aged 9 – 18 months old. For the keepers of breeding herds in the Shetland Islands the BVD Check test involves sampling 5 calves per managed group that are 6 – 18 months old.

When done correctly, the Check Test is a powerful indicator of BVD exposure. However, the minimum testing number per managed group is often mis-interpreted

as the required number to be tested per herd. When this happens in larger herds the results can be misleading. This is because the small number of young stock tested will not be representative of the whole herd e.g. 5 animals tested out of 500.

Therefore we are proposing to update the legislation to make sure that a minimum proportion of the total number of cattle in the breeding herd are tested when using a BVD Check Test. We are proposing the minimum proportion be set at 10% as it is a requirement which can be easily understood and is likely to achieve a representative screening of the BVD exposure of the herd, with the additional cost to keepers being proportionate to herd maintained. This would be in addition to requiring that at least 10 animals per managed group in dairy herds and 5 animals per managed group in other breeding herds are sampled. This would make sure that test results were representative of the whole herd.

In relation to keepers in the Shetland Islands we are also proposing a minimum of 10% of animals are tested when using this method.

Question 1: Do you think that a BVD check test should require a minimum of 10% of animals to be tested?

Options:

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your views:

Proposal 2: Shorter Compulsory BVD Investigation (CBI) period

Breeding herds that have been BVD Not Negative continuously for 15 months must undertake a Compulsory BVD Investigation (CBI). This generally requires getting an individual status for all animals, followed by 12 months of “follow-on” testing all calves. The CBI requires all animals in the herd which do not have an individual BVD status to be sampled within 13 months. However, there is a risk that given such a long period not all keepers manage to meet the requirements of the CBI. Keepers have reported that it is difficult to maintain focus on the testing requirements over the long time period. Failure to complete the CBI within the timescale results in enforcement activity from the keeper’s local authority.

Therefore we are seeking views on reducing the time to complete a CBI. A shorter period may help keepers to maintaining focus on getting an individual status for all animals therefore promote compliance. However, we are aware that reducing the time period may also introduce further complexity and/or undue pressure on keepers. We are not proposing a change to the 12 month period of follow-on calf testing.

Question 2: How many months do you think that cattle keepers should have to complete their CBI? Please explain your views:

Options:

- Free text box

Proposal 3: Veterinary certification after Compulsory BVD Investigation (CBI)

There are two options to complete a CBI. Option 1 involves getting an individual negative status for every animal in a herd followed by a year of calf testing. Option 2 involves a veterinary declaration signed by an approved vet that sufficient BVD action or investigation has been done and the CBI is no longer required. When a herd completes a CBI by option 1, the herd must immediately start “follow-on” calf testing. The current process relies on a BVD approved laboratory to set herd status on the basis of the test results of “follow-on” calf testing. If a herd fails to complete their follow-on calf testing within the timeframe then it may potentially enter another CBI.

To reduce the likelihood of herds entering another CBI, we are proposing veterinary certification at the end of “follow-on” calf testing. This would require vets to certify that at least 12 months have passed since the last PI moved off the holding AND that all calves born in the last 12 months have a BVD Negative status.

This would increase veterinary involvement after a CBI and help maintain the keeper’s focus on BVD. ScotEID could also be set up to send automated reminders that prompt vets to chase their clients.

Question 3: Do you think that herds that have completed a CBI should be required to have veterinary certification after the “follow-on” calf testing period?

Options:

- Yes;
- No;
- Please explain your views:

Proposal 4: Increased consequences of Compulsory BVD Investigation (CBI) non-compliance

Most herds entering a CBI comply within the permitted 13 month period for samples to be taken from each animal in the herd which does not have an individual BVD status. However, about 17% of herds fail to comply by the deadline.

Non-compliant CBI herds remain partially or completely untested. If they have undetected PIs, BVD will continue to circulate in the herd and will put neighbours and purchasers at risk. PIs may spread infection over the fence to neighbours, in-calf females may carry PI calves, and BVD Negative cattle leaving the herd may carry transient BVD infection to the market and/or their new herd. Phase 5 does not tackle the additional risk posed by undetected PIs that may be in non-compliant CBI herds.

Currently, non-compliant CBI herds are categorised as BVD Not Negative and are subject to the same restrictions as any other Not Negative herd i.e. animals can only move off the holding if they: a) are going direct to slaughter; b) have an individual BVD Negative status; or c) (under exceptional circumstances) if licensed off by a veterinary inspector or the Scottish Ministers.

We are therefore seeking views on additional restrictions for non-compliant CBI herds to minimise the additional BVD risk these holdings pose and ensure keepers meet their legal obligations to take samples. We wish to gather views on the following proposals:

- No cattle of any sort allowed to move off the holding regardless of individual BVD status. Animals would not even be allowed to go to slaughter.
- No movements off the holding for production or breeding regardless of individual BVD status. Animals would only be allowed to go direct to slaughter.
- No movements of female animals off the holding regardless of individual BVD status, to protect buyers from purchasing in-calf females carrying PI calves.
- No movements on to the holding (i.e. same as for a herd with a detected PI).
- Publishing a list of non-compliant CBI herds e.g. on ScotEID. This would alert neighbours/potential purchasers/farm assurance bodies to the BVD risk posed by these holdings.

Question 4: Do you think that all cattle on non-compliant CBI holdings should not be allowed to move off the holding for any reason (including slaughter), regardless of individual BVD status?

Options:

- Yes;
- No;
- Please explain your views;

Question 5: Do you think that all cattle on non-compliant CBI holdings should only be allowed to move directly to slaughter, regardless of their individual BVD status?

Options:

- Yes;
- No;
- Please explain your views;

Question 6: Do you think that female animals on non-compliant CBI holdings should only be allowed to move directly to slaughter, regardless of their individual BVD status?

Options:

- Yes;
- No;
- Please explain your views;

Question 7: Do you think that no cattle should be able to move on to a non-compliant CBI holdings?

Options:

- Yes;

- No;
- Please explain your views;

Question 8: Do you think that non-compliant CBI herds should be publicly listed e.g. on ScotEID?

Options:

- Yes;
- No;
- Please explain your views;

Proposal 5: Incorporating BVD compliance in to single farm payments

A new single farm payment scheme will be introduced in Scotland as a replacement for the Common Agricultural Policy payments. Animal Health and Welfare conditions will be introduced as part of these payments. It may be possible to include BVD compliance as a conditional requirement of receiving single farm payments. This would recognise the hard work that keepers undergo to meet BVD requirements. It would also help to bring all herds in to compliance by providing a stronger incentive to comply with the scheme.

Farm payments would not be lost if a herd becomes Not-Negative, but instead herds would be penalised for long-term non-compliance. An example of a non-compliance would be a CBI herd that still does not have a status for every animal 13 months after entering a CBI.

Question 9: Do you think that BVD compliance should be a conditional requirement for receiving single farm payments?

Options:

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your views;

Proposal 6: Increased testing for calves of animals purchased in-calf (“Trojan cows”)

If a pregnant cow becomes transiently infected with BVD in the first 120 days of her pregnancy and has a live calf, it will be a PI. She will revert to being BVD Negative once her transient infection has passed but the calf cannot be tested until it is born. If she is sold in-calf, the buyer’s herd will be exposed to BVD if a PI calf is born. In this scenario the pregnant animal is known as a “Trojan cow”. These animals appear to be responsible for approximately 25% of BVD breakdowns.

To make sure that PIs from purchased in-calf cows are identified as soon as possible, we are proposing that calves from such animals brought into the herd are individually tested within 40 days of being born. This will help to minimise the impact of Trojan cows.

Question 10: Do you think that calves born from females purchased in-calf should be individually BVD tested by 40 days of age?

Options:

- Yes;
- No;
- Please explain your views;

Proposal 7: Delaying BVD Positive herds restrictions

Phase 5 of the BVD eradication scheme introduced more penalties for herds with one or more BVD Positive animals. Current rules impose immediate herd restrictions which prevent cattle keepers with BVD Positive results from bringing more animals on to the holding. This prompts keepers to choose between keeping the BVD Positive animal(s) and buying replacement cattle. As a result, some BVD Positive animals are killed immediately, before having the optional blood test that would confirm if they are PIs.

If keepers were given time for re-testing before restrictions for bringing animals on to the holding are put in place, e.g. 40 days after an initial BVD Positive result, this gives time for a confirmatory retest if keepers wish to do so.

Question 11: Do you think that BVD Positive herds should be allowed 40 days to arrange optional confirmatory blood sampling of suspect PIs before imposing restrictions on animals moving in to the herd?

Options:

- Yes;
- No;
- Please explain your views;

Proposal 8: No compulsory slaughter of PIs

The BVD Advisory Group continue not to support compulsory slaughter of PIs. Compulsory slaughter requires government compensation for each animal killed/slaughtered. The BVD Advisory group have strong views that no compensation should be provided for PIs as the benefits of eradicating BVD from herds outweighs finishing PI animals. The group accepts that compulsory slaughter of PIs may be required in the future, e.g. at the very last stage of BVD eradication, or after BVD eradication in Scotland. However, we are not proposing to introduce compulsory slaughter of PIs in Phase 6 of the eradication scheme.

Question 12: Do you think that Phase 6 of Scotland's BVD eradication should include compulsory slaughter?

Options:

- Yes;
- No;
- Please explain your views;

Proposal 9: More obligations for non-breeding herds

Scotland's BVD eradication scheme has historically focused on PIs. As PIs can only be created during pregnancy, the majority of controls have been on breeding herds. Non-breeding herds have been subject to limited obligations.

Unlike in breeding herds, non-breeding herds are not currently required to:

- Obtain a BVD herd status and update it regularly
- Comply with the same movement restrictions as breeding herds when a PI is confirmed in the herd e.g. being unable to move cattle in to the herd.
- House BVD Positive animals
- Test every "high risk animal" without an individual BVD status brought into a herd, to avoid the herd being placed under movement restrictions. High risk animals are animals from outside Scotland which have been moved into Scotland and have been kept in Scotland for more than 40 days; calves born on Scottish non-breeding herds or born to an animal other than a breeding animal; or animals from Scottish BVD Not Negative herds which have been moved onto and kept on a holding for more than 40 days. High risk animals include stores and breeding cattle.

As we move towards BVD eradication, the BVD advisory group believe that increasing BVD controls in non-breeding herd will help minimise the spread of BVD across Scotland. For example, untested or risky animals in non-breeding herds may spread BVD to breeding animals in neighbouring holdings by over-the-fence contact.

Therefore we are seeking views on increasing the obligations required of non-breeding herds. One option is to extend the obligations that currently apply to breeding herds to all herds. Another option is to extend some of the obligations which currently only apply to breeding herds to all herds.

Question 13: Do you think that all the requirements that currently apply only to breeding herds should apply to all herds?

Options:

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your views;

Question 14: Do you think that the requirement to obtain and regularly update a BVD herd status should be extended to all herds?

Options:

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your views;

Question 15: Do you think that all herds with a confirmed PI should be unable to move cattle in to the herd?

Options:

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your views;

Question 16: Do you think that the requirement to house PIs should be extended to all herds?

Options:

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your views;

Question 17: Do you think that all herds should be required to test high risk animals?

Options:

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your views;



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

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Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

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