

01/08/2026

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to both the British Llama Society and the British Alpaca Society to inform you of a confirmed case of Bluetongue-3 in a llama in North Devon.

I examined this llama on 21/07/2026. He was a 26 year old castrated male llama, in a small herd of 4. The herd was not vaccinated for Bluetongue. The llama was undergoing treatment for several concurrent illnesses, including skin disease and an infection in his foot. He had been slightly withdrawn for several days, but was still coming up for hard feed as per normal.

On the morning I examined him, his owner had found him laying flat out on his side. He was in distress with rapid, shallow breathing with his mouth open. On examination, he had slight crackles in his lungs and a small area of reddening on his dental pad. His temperature was normal, and his gums and tongue appeared a normal colour.

In Europe, Bluetongue has presented in camelids as breathing difficulties. In our area, we had been seeing a growing number of suspected Bluetongue cases in sheep and cattle for the previous 2 weeks. With these things in mind, the owner and I sought permission from APHA to test him for Bluetongue virus. The llama was then put to sleep as per the owner's request.

The owner had been monitoring the Bluetongue situation via the government website. The information here lags behind the "on the ground" situation by 2 weeks or so. This is due to the time taken to confirm infections with laboratory testing and then internal admin. The owner was surprised to hear that there were suspected Bluetongue cases very close by, with some already having been confirmed in the lab. An immediate decision was made to vaccinate the remaining llamas.

None of the three available bluetongue vaccines are licensed for llamas and alpacas. However, they have been used both in the UK and Europe safely in both species. I and colleagues have prescribed the vaccines safely in breeding alpaca herds in mid pregnancy with no adverse effects.

Llamas and alpacas are recommended to have a course of 2 injections, three weeks apart. This should be given under the skin. Immunity will start to build after the second injection, reaching peak immunity after 3-4 weeks.

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The risk period for Bluetongue is dependent on the midge population and the weather. We anticipate that midges will be active until at least October, perhaps November if the weather stays warm.

Vaccination is the only effective means of preventing Bluetongue disease. Insect repellants do not provide sufficient protection against biting insects. The vaccine is a killed virus vaccine, and cannot cause the disease it is protecting against. I would strongly urge all camelid owners to have a discussion with their veterinary surgeon about vaccination of their animals. Even if camelids are being kept in an area where Bluetongue cases are being seen, it is not too late to vaccinate. Not every animal will be bitten by an infected midge straight away and vaccination will provide protection for the second half of the risk period.

In this current outbreak, we have only had cases of BTV-3 confirmed. There is no suspicion of other strains of the virus.

Clinical signs in camelids are more subtle than those in sheep. The signs shown in this llama case could potentially have been made more severe by his advanced age and other concurrent illnesses. Changes to look out for in camelids include

- Lethargy or a more withdrawn behaviour
- Reduced appetite, especially for forage
- Flanks looking hollow due to reduced gut fill
- Getting out of breath more easily
- Increased breathing rate
- Flaring of nostrils or even open mouthed breathing
- Bruising or reddening of gums or tongue

Bluetongue is a notifiable disease. If you suspect bluetongue in your livestock, either contact your vet or you can report directly to Defra. Where Bluetongue is suspected, Defra will fund the testing of up to three animals with clinical signs.

In England, call the Defra Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301. In Wales, contact 0300 303 8268. In Scotland, contact your local Field Services Office.

You can find more information online at

<https://ahdb.org.uk/bluetongue>

<https://ruminanthw.org.uk>

Yours faithfully

Jenny Schmidt BVSc, MRCVS.