

Industry requested BVD Herd Restrictions move a step closer



Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI) has welcomed discussions held at the AERA Committee on Thursday 14th November, on legislation to allow the introduction of BVD herd restrictions. DAERA's proposal is that new BVD legislation could be in place in early January 2025. The BVD Implementation Group, which includes key stakeholders from industry, has been calling for the introduction of BVD herd restrictions for several years.

A public consultation was held by DAERA on the introduction of herd restrictions in October 2022 and the Department produced its Summary of Responses and Way Forward document in October 2023. A key finding of the consultation was that the introduction of herd restrictions in NI as a disease control measure for BVD was welcomed by 100% of respondents.

The introduction of herd restrictions in NI should lead to a significant improvement in progress towards eradicating the BVD virus. Few herds in NI are truly 'closed herds'; many farmers purchase cattle at times for various reasons, such as to increase herd size, improve the genetics of the herd or to restock after a disease outbreak. A herd's BVD status may be put at risk through the purchase of high-risk cattle, as transiently infected animals are a potential route of transmission for the BVD virus out of infected herds, therefore it is vital that the virus is confined in these herds.

Herds with Positive or Inconclusive results

Small numbers of herds should be impacted directly by the introduction of restrictions, which will serve to protect the majority of herds in NI. The proposals emerging from DAERA's Summary are that herd restrictions would be applied initially 28 days after the keeper has been notified by the Department of a BVD Positive or Inconclusive test result; provided these animals are destroyed or have a negative retest within 28 days of notification, no restrictions would be applied. This 28-day 'grace period' would reduce to seven days after three months and to zero after a further nine months. At this stage (one year after the introduction of the legislation), restrictions would be applied immediately following a positive BVD result.

Restrictions would prohibit all moves in or out of a herd and any associated herds, however they would be lifted when 21 days have passed since the last BVD Positive or BVD Inconclusive animal has been removed from the herd and associated herds and when all animals (except those up to 30 days of age) in the herd and associated herds have a negative BVD status directly or indirectly.

When DAERA's computer system is sufficiently developed, herds that have been restricted due to the presence of a BVD Positive animal will have individual restrictions placed on females of breeding age (12 months and over).

Herds with cattle untested for BVD

From four months after the start of the new legislation being in force, movement restrictions prohibiting all moves in or out of a herd and any associated herds will be applied if there are 20 or more animals present in the herd that have not had a BVD test and that are more than 30 days of age. Six months later, the threshold for the application of restrictions would be reduced to 10 or more untested animals, and after a further six months the threshold would drop to 5 or more untested animals.

From the introduction of the second phase of BVD legislation, cattle born before 1st March 2016 will also have a BVD Unknown status and will require to be tested. In other words, the presence of these 'older' cattle will contribute to the BVDU count on which the application of restrictions will be based.

Farmers can take steps to avoid BVD restrictions being imposed on their herd, primarily by keeping the virus out in the first instance and by ensuring that all calves are tested promptly. In BVD breakdown situations, herd owners are advised to speak to their private vet for advice.

Notes for editors:

AHWNI is responsible for the delivery of the Northern Ireland BVD Eradication Scheme. For more information on the operation of the Scheme, please contact AHWN (email info@animalhealthni.com, telephone 028 7963 9333) or visit the AHWN website www.animalhealthni.com.