

Advice 22-2012 of the Scientific Committee of the FASFC on the risk of reintroduction/recirculation of Schmallerberg virus in Belgium in 2012.

In the summer and fall of 2011, Belgium was confronted with a considerable circulation amongst ruminants of a novel Orthobunyavirus that was named « Schmallerbergvirus » (SBV). This virus mainly caused abortion, stillbirth and fetal malformation in sheep lambs and goat kids and subsequently in calves. Furthermore this virus also caused more general symptoms in milking cows such as fever, milk drop and diarrhea.

Following this outbreak, the Scientific Committee decided to open a self-tasking dossier on the risk of reintroduction/recirculation of this virus on Belgian territory and formulated a number of recommendations regarding the surveillance and prevention in Belgium based on several possible scenarios.

The Scientific Committee is of the opinion that the risk of reintroduction/recirculation is very high but the impact will be largely dependent upon the in-herd and between-herd seroprevalence. Therefore it is very important to gain knowledge on the seroprevalence of the Belgian livestock. Preliminary results indicate that the seroprevalence can be up to 70% (Netherlands). If such a high seroprevalence is also present in Belgium, circulation of SBV during the vector season 2012 and accompanying clinical symptoms will probably be minimal.

Regarding the surveillance for SBV during the vector season 2012, the Scientific Committee proposes to base it on 3 pillars.

Firstly there is vector surveillance: it is recommended to continue the monitoring of *Culicoides* as it was installed after the BTV8 epidemic to determine the periods and peaks of activity and to link this activity with eventual clinical signs. It is also recommended to extend this surveillance to all *Culicoides* species, midges and exotic insects.

Secondly there is passive or syndromic surveillance which is the best system for an early detection, although the symptoms are not specific. Nevertheless the Scientific Committee considers this as a unique opportunity to strengthen the epidemiologic vigilance in Belgium and recommends to use the already existing sentinel veterinarians and monitoring systems (MOSS, Veepeiler) for this purpose. In that way the surveillance can be intensified and a diagnosis for all suspect cases can be made by exclusion of SBV.

Thirdly there is serologic monitoring of which the importance will depend on the seroprevalence after the first season. If the seroprevalence is high, which is very likely, serologic monitoring will be of limited use for early detection. Nevertheless it is recommended to use paired sera for every (suspected) case. On the long term, for the next seasons it will be necessary to monitor the seroprevalence on the farms in a qualitative and quantitative (titers) manner. The Scientific Committee is of the opinion that the already existing screening for BTV8 can be a useful tool to reach this goal.

Finally, given the many unknown factors, the Scientific Committee makes some recommendations for future scientific research.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french, respectively under the section "Wetenschappelijk Comité/Adviezen" and "Comité scientifique/Avis".