

## **Rapid advice 19-2014 of the Scientific Committee of the FASFC on the risks of introduction of Bluetongue virus serotype 4 in Belgium.**

Recently, Bluetongue virus (BTV) emerged in South-East Europe in sheep, goats and cattle during which serotype 4 (BTV4) was isolated. Given these circumstances, the Scientific Committee was asked to give a rapid advice on the possible introduction of BTV4 in Belgium. More specifically, it was asked to identify the risks for the introduction of BTV4 and to investigate the need for additional measures in order to prevent the introduction of the virus in Belgium and to detect a potential introduction at an early stage.

The Scientific Committee has listed all possible ways of introduction of BTV4 and has assigned them a score according to their risk for the introduction of BTV4 in Belgium. The main risks lie in the intra-community trade of ruminants and the natural inflow of infected vectors from infected regions.

Although depended on many factors, the spread of infected vectors is believed to be the most likely way of introduction of BTV4. This way of introduction is difficult to prevent. In general, the introduction of BTV4 in Belgium or in its neighboring countries, in the absence of vaccination, is deemed realistic at the end of the vector season 2015 or during the vector season 2016.

The Scientific Committee is of the opinion that the passive and active surveillance, as it is currently organized in Belgium, are sufficient to detect an introduction of BTV4. However, it is recommended to include farms that are located near important introduction spots (e.g. airports, ports, highways,...) in the active surveillance and to perform this active surveillance not only during winter but during the entire year.

The experiences with the past BTV8 epidemic (2006-2010) have shown that vaccination is a very effective measure to prevent and control a BTV epidemic. To prevent a possible spread of BTV4 in Belgium, it is important to have a sufficiently high vaccination coverage in sheep, goats and cattle. If during the 2015 vector season the virus is further spreading towards North-Western Europe then the installation of a generalized vaccination campaign will strongly reduce the risk of a BTV4 epidemic in Belgium. The Scientific Committee recommends to consider such a vaccination campaign once a BTV4 outbreak is notified within a 700 km zone around Brussels.

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