



September 2021

## Three cases of Bluetongue virus in wild bighorn sheep in the south Okanagan

On August 26th, 2021 the BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries (BCMAFF) were informed of three confirmed cases of Bluetongue virus (BTV) in wild bighorn sheep in the south Okanagan. Strain typing is pending. White-tailed deer in the area are also believed to be affected. There have been a total of twenty bighorn and white-tailed deer reported dead in the area.

BTV can infect a variety of wild and domestic ruminants including sheep, cattle, bighorn sheep, and mountain goats but generally only causes severe disease in sheep and occasionally white-tailed deer.

BTV does not pose a threat to public health or food safety.

There are 27 serotypes of BTV, five of these are present in the US (2, 10, 11, 13, and 17) and a finding of one of these in Canada is immediately notifiable to the CFIA. The remaining 22 serotypes are considered exotic to Canada and remain reportable diseases. A finding of BTV-8 in Canada would initiate an immediate response from the CFIA and would likely lead to severe market impacts. The CFIA may respond to a BTV outbreak caused by a serotype other than BTV-8 if it is causing severe clinical disease.

BTV does not establish persistent infection in ruminants and is only spread by certain species of biting midges. In BC we have sporadic outbreaks of BTV in the Okanagan every few years and are thought to be due to midges being blown across the US border, rather than due to resident midge populations. Midge activity ceases with the first frost and therefore there is no evidence that BTV can survive winter in Canada.

British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries reminds veterinarians to remain vigilant for BTV infection in ruminants. For livestock, keeping animals inside at dawn and dusk when the midges tend to be most active may decrease the risk of transmission. There are no vaccines for Bluetongue licensed in Canada. As the midges that transmit Bluetongue are only found in the southern Okanagan, this does not pose a risk to livestock elsewhere in the province. If anyone has animals with consistent clinical signs or sudden death of multiple animals, they should contact their veterinarian or the Animal Health Centre at 604-556-3003.

More information can be found here: <https://inspection.canada.ca/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/diseases/reportable/bluetongue/fact-sheet/eng/1306116803992/1306121522520>