
RESOLUTION NUMBER: 2, 5, and 15 COMBINED APPROVED

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AND EMERGING ANIMAL DISEASES
COMMITTEE ON FARMED CERVIDAE
COMMITTEE ON PARASITIC AND VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

SUBJECT MATTER: Re-evaluation of Endemic Bluetongue Virus Serotypes in the United States

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

There is significant interest in reconsideration of the exotic/endemic classifications of selected serotypes of bluetongue virus (BTV). This interest is shared by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the livestock industry, farmed cervids industry, wildlife interests (cervids), and numerous research and diagnostic laboratories. The interest in this topic is based on the following observations:

- The BTV global range has been expanding since the 1990s.
- Bluetongue transmission continues to evolve due to climate change and animal management procedures.
- The United States (US) BTV endemic serotype list (2, 10, 11, 13, 17) has not been updated since the 1980s. Since 1999, 12 additional serotypes (BTV-1, 3-6, 9, 12, 14, 18, 19, 22, 24) have been introduced into the Southeastern US.
- Some of these viruses not currently on the endemic serotype list have spread beyond the Southeast and have been repeatedly confirmed in multiple states in the past 10 years (e.g., BTV-1, 3, 12, 18).
- BTV positive status for import/export considerations is not specific to serotype. An animal is positive or negative based on a commercial competitive enzyme linked immunosorbent assay intended to detect all serotypes.
- An increased number of serotypes acknowledged as endemic in the US, to reflect that actual prevalence data, will not change/impact trade restrictions.
- Continuing to classify newly endemic serotypes as 'exotic' does, however, require these circulating viruses to be considered as biosafety level three (BSL-3) agents. This higher level of biocontainment severely restricts research on pathogenesis, host range, vector competence, diagnostics, and vaccines for these additional US serotypes. This reclassification would enable research to develop better diagnostics for routine diagnostic and surveillance testing.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association urges the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to utilize seroprevalence, molecular, and virological data from National Animal Health Laboratory Network laboratories, the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study and other relevant research and diagnostic laboratories to develop criteria for classifying bluetongue virus (BTV) serotypes as endemic versus exotic and then to apply those criteria to the current United States list of classified bluetongue serotypes. These criteria should be reviewed by USDA-APHIS at a minimum of every five years to keep the United States endemic BTV serotype list current and relevant.

INTERIM RESPONSE:

The United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services recognizes the concerns of the United States Animal Health Association and appreciates the opportunity to respond.

APHIS-VS will coordinate meetings with interested stakeholders, such as the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, USDA ARS Arthropod-Borne Animal Diseases Research Unit, University of Florida, Colorado State University, and others, to evaluate the feasibility of creating a mechanism to collect and evaluate BTV serotyping and sequencing data in order to report serotype distribution within the United States. The first meeting was held on January 25, 2021 with APHIS, ARS, Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, and university participants. The charge to the group was discussed. Information is being gathered regarding current definitions for endemic serotypes, serological nomenclature and methods, and correlations of genomic data and serotypes. Regular meetings are planned. VS will use the information from the working group in its review of the current approach to BTV.

FINAL RESOLUTION

The USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services (VS) recognizes the concerns of USAHA and appreciates the opportunity to respond.

APHIS-VS (including the Center for Epidemiology and Animal Health, Trade staff, and the National Veterinary Services Laboratories) coordinated several teleconferences with the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, USDA ARS Arthropod-Borne Animal Diseases Research Unit, University of Florida, and Colorado State University. These calls summarized the current status of diagnostics, virus characterization, and available data, as well as recommendations for potential prospective surveillance, including outlining the minimum criteria recommended for standardization and sharing of data. Additionally, a cross-unit VS group was formed in June 2021 with the charge to leverage this information to update the status of serotypes in the United States. VS continues to take actions to more fully address this resolution.