

The surveillance programme for bluetongue in Norway 2014

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Surveillance programmes for terrestrial and aquatic animals in Norway

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The surveillance programme for bluetongue in Norway 2014

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All bulk milk samples tested in 2014 were negative for antibodies against bluetongue virus serotype 8.

Introduction

Bluetongue is a disease caused by Bluetongue virus (BTV) which comprises 24 serotypes (BTV 1-24). The virus is insect-borne and midges of genus *Culicoides* transmit BTV to susceptible ruminants, -after being infected by feeding on viraemic animals. After replication in the insect's salivary glands, which depends upon ambient temperature, the virus can be transmitted to new vertebrate hosts. Therefore, infection has a seasonal occurrence.

In 2006 an outbreak of bluetongue serotype 8 (BTV 8) started in the Netherlands and rapidly spread among the ruminant population in the European countries the following years. A surveillance programme for BTV 8 based on bulk milk serology was conducted in 2008. Four cattle herds in the southern part of Norway were seropositive for BTV 8. After 2 years of comprehensive monitoring and surveillance of BTV 8 without any further discovery of infected herds, Norway regained free status for bluetongue. The surveillance programme for BTV could be reduced to a small programme based on bulk milk serology.

Aim

The aim of the surveillance programme for bluetongue is to document freedom from the infection in Norway according to the demands in Regulation (EC) No.1266/2007, Annex 1.1.2, and to contribute to the maintenance of this favourable situation.

Material and methods

The target population of dairy herds consisted of all cattle herds delivering milk to dairies during the sampling period from October to November, after the end of the vector season. Bulk milk samples were collected from 506 dairy herds in counties with coast-line in southern part of Norway. This included the counties of Østfold, Akershus, Oslo, Buskerud, Vestfold, Telemark, Aust-Agder, Vest-Agder and Rogaland. The number of herds per county in 2014 and the number of herds selected in the surveillance programme for bluetongue from 2011 to 2014 is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of dairy herds in 2014 and numbers of dairy herds tested in the surveillance programme for bluetongue in Norway in 2011 - 2014.

County	Number of dairy herds in 2014	Number of dairy herds tested per county			
		2011	2012	2013	2014
Østfold	146	166	157	99	108
Akershus/Oslo	137	143	142	77	91
Buskerud	199	136	94	10	14
Vestfold	72	80	76	43	41
Telemark	101	131	104	17	14
Aust-Agder	100	105	100	39	49
Vest-Agder	257	264	228	114	107
Rogaland	1 335	1 270	1 187	97	74
Other counties		239	376	14	8
Total	2 347	2 590	2 474	510	506

The samples were tested with an Indirect ELISA (ID Screen® Blue Tongue Milk) for detection of antibodies against BTV. Samples with inconclusive or seropositive ELISA results were retested in duplicate with the same ELISA. In case of positive bulk milk test, blood samples from all lactating dairy cows in the herd would be examined for antibodies with the ID Screen® Bluetongue Competition ELISA. In case of seropositive animals, all animals in the herd would be examined for BTV with real time RT-PCR (5).

The samples were analysed at the Norwegian Veterinary Institute in Sandnes and the Section for Immunology in Oslo.

Results and discussion

Of 506 bulk milk samples collected in 2014, none tested positive for BTV 8. In 2009 four cattle herds were found positive for BTV 8. They had most probably been infected in early autumn in 2008 from airborne infected midges from Denmark (6). The agent has not been detected in Norway since 2009 thus the cattle population has no antibodies against BTV.

Cattle are efficient sentinel animals for bluetongue. Beef cattle are not included in the programme because both dairy and beef cattle are kept in the same geographical areas. Most dairy cattle have to be kept outdoors, at least 8 weeks during the summer, making their exposure to midges not very different from the exposure of beef cattle to the vector.

The most likely method of bluetongue introduction to Norway is either by import of infected animals or by airborne transfer of infected *Culicoides*. Imports of ruminants from EU countries not free from bluetongue, and all imports from countries outside EU are tested for the disease. The topography in Norway with hills and valleys makes it difficult for long distance transfer of *Culicoides* from one local area to another and there are relatively few ruminants per area and areas are small compared to the rest of Europe which makes it less likely for a widespread of the agent if BTV should be introduced.

The most important purpose of the surveillance programme is to reveal potential infections brought in with airborne midges during the vector season. The most probable entry of windborne infected midges is in the southern part of Norway from the beginning of May until the end of October. Infected midges may come from Sweden, Denmark or Scotland. Testing of bulk milk collected in the end of October will detect any infection introduced during the vector season.

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