

BVD MESSAGES AT THE START OF THE CALVING SEASON

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With the calving season upon us, it is important to remember that some simple steps can be taken to prevent the spread of BVD as we move toward eradication. Whilst the number of BVD affected herds is now very low, the impact can be significant, both for herds with positive results and their neighbours so it is critical to ensure that all possible measures are in place to prevent the spread of infection.

Sample calves promptly

- ✓ The longer a BVD virus positive (BVD+) calf is on farm, the more likely infection will spread within the farm as well as to other farms in the neighbourhood.
- ✓ Tag all newborn calves as soon as possible after birth. Note that calves must be dry to minimise the occurrence of 'empty' tags (tags that do not contain any tissue). Newborn calves should be isolated from pregnant cows and good biosecurity maintained until a negative result has been received.
- ✓ Those signed up to the National Genotyping Programme will have Double Tissue Tags. Note that BVD sampling through this scheme will require a new set of taggers. BVD sample bottles/vials and lab envelopes are white in colour whereas DNA sample bottles/vials and lab envelopes are pink. Ensure each sample type is sent to the appropriate laboratory.

Send samples to lab quickly

- ✓ Submit samples to the testing laboratory shortly after being taken. Place samples in a sealable bag within a padded envelope. Write your name, address and herd number on the top left hand corner of the envelope and remember to include the text 'Exempt Animal Specimen' on the back of the envelope.
- ✓ From 1st February 2024, the minimum fee for submitting tags through the postal system (even for one tag) to a laboratory in Ireland or Northern Ireland is €2.95. This should be sufficient for up to 10 samples, provided they are packed flat, rather than bulked up within the envelope. For larger numbers, it is advisable to take your package to the post office to ensure the correct postage is paid.

Act quickly if positive results are received

- ✓ Where positive or inconclusive tissue tag results are obtained, isolate the calves immediately and remove promptly to obtain the higher financial support from DAFM and reduce the risk of further within-herd spread resulting in sick calves, positive births or delayed lifting of restrictions and transmission to other herds. Confirmatory testing of these animals is no longer permitted.

Be aware of the neighbourhood risk

- ✓ It is recognised that the closer herds are to an infected herd in their neighbourhood, the more likely they themselves are to experience infection. Recent analysis has shown that breeding herds within 400m of a positive herd have a one in seven chance of being positive the following year. For this reason, herds that are in the same neighbourhood as herds that had BVD+ calves in 2023 (herds within, or adjacent to, the coloured hexagons in Figure 1) are at particular risk of having had infection introduced last year, resulting in BVD+ births this year. It is particularly important that these herds should tag and test promptly and review biosecurity to ensure that any BVD+ calves are detected as quickly as possible, preventing virus spread within the herd and transfer to other herds. Check your locality in the map below.
- ✓ Taking this increased risk into account, DAFM will now issue a biosecurity advisory letter to all herds within 400m of herds with positive results, rather than just to contiguous herds, informing them of their increased risk of infection and providing appropriate advice.

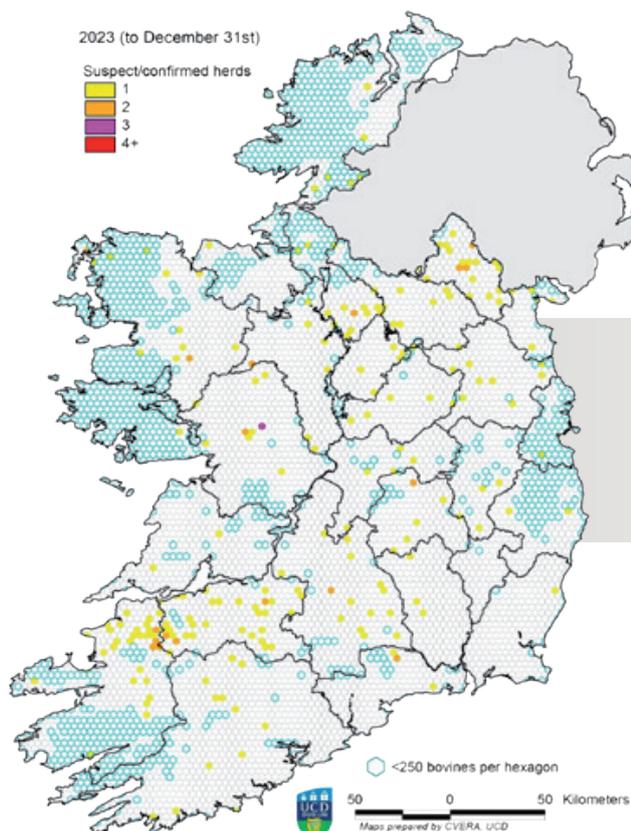


Figure 1. Map showing the distribution of herds with BVD+ herds in 2023. Herds in these and adjacent hexagons are at increased risk of having BVD+ calves in 2024 and should ensure that calves are sampled and tested as soon as possible after birth and that biosecurity measures are in place.

Biosecurity advice for herds in the neighbourhood of positive herds

A review of biosecurity, including vaccination, and extra precautions to be taken by herdowners and visitors, should include the following areas:

Purchased cattle (or those returning from sales, shows or contract rearing)

- ✓ Introducing animals is an important way for BVD (and other diseases) to arrive on a farm. One way to control this risk is to hold introduced cattle in a quarantine facility (building or paddock) for at least 28 days. Where purchased cattle are pregnant, there is also the further risk that they may be trojan dams carrying a BVD+ foetus.
- ✓ Pregnant animals should therefore have their calves sampled promptly and kept away from other pregnant animals until tested negative for BVD. The use of hired, leased or borrowed bulls also poses a potential risk.

Movement of personnel without adequate attention to hygiene

- ✓ All individuals coming onto a farm who may have had direct or indirect contact with cattle from other herds, including employees, relief workers, professional visitors (vet, AI, milk recorder, hoof trimmer etc) and the farmer themselves, should use farm specific boots and clothing or take steps to ensure that adequate cleaning and disinfection procedures are followed.

Boundary contact

- ✓ Wherever possible, cattle up to at least 120 days of pregnancy should not graze at boundaries where nose to nose contact with other cattle is feasible. Boundaries should be sufficient to provide a gap of at least 3m and prevent cattle breaking in or out (even if only on a temporary basis using an electric fence).

Equipment

- ✓ Movement or sharing of large or small items of equipment should be avoided where possible. Otherwise, these should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before use. This also applies to shared trailers, pens or crushes.

BVD vaccination

- ✓ While vaccination will not prevent the entry of BVD virus (or IBR, Lepto etc) onto a farm, it can minimize the impact of accidental introduction. Herds that are vaccinating for BVD should complete the vaccination in the pre-breeding period, to maximise foetal protection.
- ✓ Herds that had a positive/inconclusive result in 2023 are required to undertake a second round of DAFM-funded vaccination in 2024 of all females aged 12 months old and above. It is key that this vaccination is given in the pre-breeding period. Note that this may be earlier than 12 months since the last vaccination round. This should give sufficient time for heifers to receive a completed primary course of vaccination.