VOLUNTARY VACCINE SHOULD BE VIEWED AS ‘COMPULSORY’

VACCINATION on bluetongue-infected premises could be made compulsory through legal channels if livestock keepers are unwilling to participate voluntarily, according to new emergency vaccination plans.

The 2008 delivery plan for emergency vaccination against bluetongue serotype-8 (BTV-8) – published by DEFRA – states that this approach may be necessary because experience from continental Europe and advice from epidemiologists suggest that infected premises will be the most likely source of infection when the disease re-emerges later this year.

It claims that the implementation of a vaccination programme could significantly reduce bluetongue virus circulation and limit its geographical distribution – ultimately contributing to its control and potential eradication. However, it is hoped that keepers on infected premises will initially vaccinate voluntarily in the knowledge that their animals will be at risk.

The delivery plan explains: “It is expected that purchasing vaccine will make economic sense for livestock keepers, as the cost of purchasing and delivering vaccine is significantly outweighed by the potential costs of the disease.”

The plan was developed in conjunction with farmers and veterinary organisations, devolved administrations and scientific experts on bluetongue. It sets out how mass vaccination can be best achieved through a voluntary approach, supported by an industry-led promotion campaign, which will allow vaccination to be rolled out as the vaccine is delivered.

Livestock keepers in the protection zone will be able to purchase the vaccine through their private vets. Although the vaccine is classed as voluntary from a legal standpoint, keepers are hoping that the industry will not see it as such.

Kevin Pearce, head of food and farming for the NFU and a member of the core group that developed the plan, told Veterinary Times: “Although it’s not a legally compulsory vaccination scheme, all of us – that includes the BVA, BCVA, sheep vets and the Royal College – are saying that this wants to be a compulsory scheme, because the industry says it’s compulsory.”

He said the plan intended to protect stock and stop the spread of disease, but because it had been cited as “voluntary”, some people might not regard it as particularly important.

According to the delivery plan, a compulsory programme would be at least 50 per cent more expensive than voluntary vaccination, due to increased regulatory burdens, administration costs and a level of enforcement to check compliance.

Encouraging take-up

Mr Pearce said: “I call this an industry compulsory vaccination programme, and I’m hoping that private vets working with the NFU, auctioneers, and sheep and beef associations – all of the recognised industry bodies – can come together and say: ‘This is a compulsory vaccination programme, even though it isn’t compulsory legally’. We want to encourage as great a take-up as possible.”

The plan – which Mr Pearce calls “a mass vaccination policy” – states that once the vaccine becomes available, the first priority will be to permit vaccination of the premises in the existing protection zone in east and south-east England. It will focus specifically on known infected premises, which will be targeted through a publicity campaign. The emergency strategy’s target is for vaccination to be carried out on at least 80 per cent of premises in the protection zone.

President Carl Bulgdet described the plan as the “industry’s best stab at trying to win the race against this infection”.

He said: “We need a great deal of peer pressure to make sure that farmers convince themselves and their neighbours to enter into a vaccination programme as soon as vaccine is available in the protection zones. It would be nice to see an industry-led compulsion to try to beat this awful infection.”

“The veterinary profession obviously has a major role to play in that, and veterinary practices need to be setting their stalls out now as to how they are going to make sure we have swift and efficient delivery of vaccine to the farmers and their animals.”

Livestock keepers will be allowed to administer the vaccine themselves if the animals are to be moved out of the protection zone for purposes of “domestic or intra-community trade” – in which case a level of certification and, potentially, supervision from private or official vets may be required.

DEFRA stated that it was continuing to work with veterinary organisations to develop guidance on the potential requirements for veterinary certification.

Details of the delivery plan are available at www.defra.gov.uk.

Desert trek to aid dogs

A SURREY vet is taking part in a five-day trek through the Arabian Desert to raise funds for Dogs for the Disabled.

Karan Sehgal will take part in the Desert Walk on March 9-15, starting at the Dead Sea – the lowest point on earth – and finishing in the ancient red-rock city of Petra in Jordan.

The group will trek with Bedouin guides and will sleep under the stars or in Bedouin tents. The route covers treacherous terrain and Mr Sehgal has been training hard.

He told Veterinary Times: “It was tough to start with, but we are getting fitter all the time. We are doing a few miles a day and keeping our stamina up.”

Dodge has launched an equine parasites reference manual to provide an “objective and comprehensive reference guide covering endoparasites and ectoparasites and their control”. The “all-in-one” guide has been bound as the pet trade’s brand in the Good Shopping Guide 2007/08. The guide, which focuses on the nation’s best ethical products, selected the brand due to the high animal welfare standards it demands of its farmers, the use of recyclable packaging and the absence of pesticides and preservatives in the production process.

MILES FOR MONEY: Vet Simon DeVile, of St Anne’s Veterinary Group in Eastbourne, is to run a combined 39 miles to raise money for Dogs Trust. He will take part in the Eastbourne half marathon in March and complete his first full marathon in the London Marathon in April. Visit www.4marathons.com/simondeville to sponsor him.

VOTE ONLINE: The Bella Moss Foundation has launched a survey to ask owners what their pets need from a single source.

The Bella Moss Foundation achieves charity status

THE Bella Moss Foundation will be exhibiting at Crufts this year for the first time as a UK-registered charity – the culmination of many months’ work by trustees Jill Moss, Mark Docher and Elizabeth Fairham.

Ms Moss explained: “This is good news for the foundation, as we are now in a position to raise funds for academic research and educational events that increase knowledge among veterinarians of MRSA in animals.

“Over the past three years we have helped hundreds of animal owners and those new as bacterial diseases like Clostridium difficile emerge to affect animals. Our work is ongoing and other major animal health charities are supporting our work.”

Bella Moss Foundation honorary vice-president Peter Purves said: “The extent of MRSA and other diseases in dogs is not really known – only the fact that the numbers are rising. Vets will welcome the support and information provided by the charity.”

The foundation thanked the Charities Commission for its support and help during the application process.

Celebrating special celebrities

VOTES can now be cast for the second Special Recognition Award – part of the 2008 Petplan Veterinary Awards – which celebrates vets in the media who are helping to drive awareness of pet health issues to a wider audience.

This year, the protocol has nominated five celebrity vets to go head to head for the award. The winner will be decided by online votes and presented at the annual awards ceremony – held in association with Veterinary Times – on April 1 in Birmingham.

Above: Steve Leonard, left; Scott Miller: Below left: to right; Joe Inglis, Matt Brash and Bruce Fogle.

This year’s nominees, as voted by the public are: Joe Inglis (Blue Peter, The One Show), Matt Brash (Vet in the Rescue, Zoo Vet at Large), Scott Miller (The Morning EXTINCT), Steve Leonard (Vet in the Wild and the forthcoming Hell on Earth), and veteran Bruce Fogle (best-selling author and co-founder and vice-chairman of the charity Hearing Dogs for Deaf People).

Simon Wheeler, the head of marketing at Petplan, explained: “The Special Recognition Award is designed to recognise the invaluable work of popular celebrity vets who champion animal health and welfare issues in the media with regular TV appearances, documentaries, books and charity work.

The shortlisted candidates were selected from nominations that even included non-veterinary suggestions, such as River Cottage chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and The X Factor supremo Simon Cowell. The Pet O’Gady Show regular Marc Abraham won last year’s award.

View mini biographies for each nominee and cast a vote at www.petplan.co.uk before the closing date of March 20.