

1 **Review**

2  
3 **How is Europe positioned for a re-emergence of Schmallenberg virus?**

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14 **Abstract**

15           The Schmallenberg virus (SBV) caused a large scale epidemic in Europe from 2011–2013  
16 infecting ruminants and causing fetal deformities after infection of pregnant animals. The main  
17 impacts of the virus were financial losses due to animal, meat and semen trade restrictions.  
18 Even though effective vaccines were produced, their uptake was never high. This along with the  
19 subsequent decline in new SBV infections and natural replacement of previously exposed livestock  
20 has resulted in a drop in the number of protected animals. Recent surveillance has found a large  
21 population of naïve animals currently present in Europe and the virus circulating at a low level.  
22 These changes in animal status in combination with favourable conditions for the insect vectors  
23 may open the door to the re-emergence of the virus and another large-scale outbreak in Europe.  
24 This review details the potential and preparedness for SBV re-emergence in Europe, discusses  
25 possible co-ordinated sentinel monitoring programmes both for ruminant seroconversion and the  
26 presence of virus in the insect vectors and provides an overview of the economic impact associated  
27 with diagnosis, control and the effect of non-vaccination.

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31 *Keywords:* Schmallenberg virus; Monitoring; Re-emergence, Surveillance

## 32 **Introduction**

33 Schmallenberg virus (SBV) is an Orthobunyavirus of the Simbu serogroup that was  
34 responsible for a large-scale outbreak of fetal deformities in lambs and calves in Northern Europe in  
35 2011–13 (Hoffmann et al., 2012). The virus causes little or no disease in adult animals but displays  
36 a distinct tropism for the central nervous system of lambs and calves infected *in utero* leading to a  
37 range of distinctive deformities including hydrocephalus and arthrogryposis (Bayrou et al., 2014;  
38 Peperkamp et al., 2015). In the years since its initial emergence, SBV appears to have settled to a  
39 low-level endemic circulation. Considerable research into SBV and its epidemiology (Helmer et al.,  
40 2013; Luttkholt et al., 2014; Veldhuis et al., 2014) has been conducted since its discovery,  
41 including the development of commercial vaccines (Kraatz et al., 2015). However, several years of  
42 little or no clinical disease and a lack of clarity about the economic impacts have resulted in very  
43 poor uptake of the vaccine. It is also unclear what conditions could result in a further large scale  
44 outbreak, but it is likely that herd-level immunity to the virus at a European and a local level has  
45 decreased, creating the potential conditions for another outbreak of fetal deformities. This review  
46 summarises the current state of preparedness for further SBV outbreaks in Europe.

47

## 48 **First detection and initial spread of SBV**

49 SBV was first detected in Europe in the beginning of September 2011. Infections appeared  
50 near simultaneously in 2011 in neighbouring countries Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. By  
51 February 2012 and May 2012 peaks in infections in sheep and cattle respectively had been  
52 identified. At the height of the outbreak in 2013, SBV cases were reported in 13,846 herds in 29  
53 countries, with 8730 being laboratory confirmed. It is difficult to calculate the actual numbers of  
54 animals affected as only herd level data were collected and reported in many countries (Afonso et  
55 al., 2014). In the UK, seroprevalence in the most affected counties by the end of 2013 was 73%.  
56 However, in other UK areas, this figure was less than 50% suggesting there were a large number of  
57 animals still at risk (King et al., 2015). Circulation re-occurred the next winter and spring, though at

58 a lower peak than in 2011/12, probably due to large numbers of animals with pre-existing immunity  
59 (EFSA, 2012a).

60

61 SBV spreads extremely rapidly, estimated from EU Nomenclature of Territorial Units for  
62 Statistics (NUTS) to be 6 days from region to region (Sedda and Rogers, 2013). It has been reported  
63 in climate ranges from the Mediterranean basin (Italy and Spain) to more than latitude 60 ° north  
64 (Norway) (Balseiro et al., 2015; Monaco et al., 2013; Wisløff et al., 2014). Spread of the virus has  
65 tended to be from close-by infected regions to the next region, rarely exceeding 200 km at a time  
66 (Afonso et al., 2014). Interestingly, modelling the spread of SBV using mathematical methods has  
67 replicated the spread of SBV across Europe, uncovering a high vector competence and high  
68 replication rate for temperatures common in Europe (16-34°C) (EFSA, 2014; Gubbins et al.,  
69 2014a).

70

71 It is still unclear where the virus originated from but at least two studies have demonstrated  
72 SBV cross reactive antibodies (along with several other Simbu group viruses) in cattle in Africa  
73 prior to or after the European outbreak. In the Middle East a Simbu serogroup virus related to Aino  
74 virus was found recently, causing clinical signs similar to SBV in infected ruminants (Abutarbush et  
75 al., 2015). Several historical and recent reports have highlighted that viruses from the Simbu group,  
76 many of which have teratogenic potential, circulate within the Mediterranean basin (Lievaart-  
77 Peterson et al., 2012; Azkur et al., 2013; Chaintoutis et al., 2014; Yilmaz et al., 2014).

78 At the height of the original outbreak in Europe, herds in Northern Europe were reporting  
79 essentially all animals seroconverting to the virus, 98.5–99.8% in adult cattle and 89% in sheep  
80 (Méroc et al., 2013; Veldhuis et al., 2013) at herd level.

81

## 82 **Virus transmission**

83 SBV, like many other Bunyaviruses, is an arbovirus, i.e. it is transmitted via arthropod

84 vectors. The fact that the virus relies on vector transmission limits antigenic drift as mutations that  
85 could confer advantages in final host replication could be disadvantageous in the vector. This  
86 bottleneck has also been seen in other RNA viruses that depend on mosquito vectors, such as  
87 Venezuelan equine encephalitis virus (Forrester et al., 2012). SBV has also been found to have a  
88 low mutation rate both *in vitro*, even when passaged 10 times, and *in vivo* (Hoffmann et al., 2015).  
89 Several field studies of virus variability have also demonstrated that the virus is relatively stable  
90 over time (Coupeau et al 2016; Izzo et al., 2016).

91

92 Direct horizontal transmission by contact has not been detected, even when infected cows  
93 were kept in close proximity to uninfected cows (Wernike, 2013a). The presence of different  
94 species of insects might determine the speed and pattern of infection in different farms (Ayllón et  
95 al., 2014; Bessell et al., 2014). The main vectors are thought to be species in the *obsoletus* complex  
96 of *Culicoides*, or biting midges, including *Culicoides chiopterus*, *dewulfi* and *scoticus* (Balenghien  
97 et al., 2014; De Regge et al., 2012). Experimental studies with *C. sonorensis* (Veronesi et al., 2013),  
98 a known vector of bluetongue virus, have shown that these midges can also produce a competent  
99 infection and could act as a reservoir of the virus. Importantly, midges are most abundant between  
100 April and October, with a 'peak midge season' between July to September, which coincides with  
101 the peak of SBV seroconversion in 2012/2013 (Mellor et al., 2000; EFSA, 2012b; Larska et al.,  
102 2013; Veldhuis et al., 2013).

103

104 It is probable that SBV can overwinter in midges. Viral RNA has been detected in midges  
105 belonging to the *obsoletus* complex over-winter in north Italian farms 3 months after the SBV  
106 outbreak (Goffredo et al., 2013). Furthermore, these midges can become active at temperatures as  
107 low as 3.5°C (Sprygin et al., 2014). In Germany, it was reported that midges could be trapped  
108 during warmer (~9°C) winter days (Wernike et al., 2013c). SBV spread in winter does occur  
109 (Davies and Daly, 2013), but is likely to be limited as the threshold for replication of the virus

110 appears to be between 12 and 13°C (Gubbins et al., 2014b).

111

112 Wind also plays an important role in the transmission of the virus, as midges are easily  
113 carried on air currents. (Sedda et al., 2012; Sedda and Rogers, 2013). UK Meteorological office  
114 atmospheric dispersion models proved accurate at predicting SBV outbreaks due to midge spread.  
115 South-east, south and south-west counties in the UK were found at increased risk of outbreaks  
116 (Met-Office, 2012), from ‘midge plumes’ from mainland Europe. Wind models for midge dispersal  
117 in mainland Europe have also been used and have found that 70% of the spatial and temporal  
118 distribution of affected farms could be explained by wind movements (Sedda and Rogers, 2013).

119

## 120 **Clinical disease**

121 The main clinical disease seen in adult animals is fever, diarrhoea and, in the case of  
122 lactating animals, ‘milk drop’ syndrome. This is usually mild and self-limiting (Wernike et al.,  
123 2012, 2013a, 2013b), however during the initial SBV outbreak due to the numbers of animals  
124 involved, there was a significant effect on farm level milk production (Toson et al., 2015; Veldhuis  
125 et al., 2014). Interestingly, neither field nor experimental infections produced clinical signs in adult  
126 sheep, goats or alpacas (Wernike et al., 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Poskin et al., 2014; Laloy et al., 2015;  
127 Schulz et al., 2015). The virus however readily crosses the placenta and has been isolated from the  
128 cerebrum, nerve and astroglial cells and spinal cords of lambs (Bilk et al., 2012; Varela et al.,  
129 2013). After crossing the placenta, the virus infects and attacks the fetal central nervous system and  
130 the cerebral cortex, possibly causing necrosis (Agerholm et al., 2015).

131

132 Since SBV targets these critical cells, the level of CNS development, and therefore the  
133 susceptible period of infection, determines the severity of lesions. Consistent with infection with  
134 other *Bunyaviridae* (Kurogi et al., 1977; Kirkland et al., 1988), infection in mid-gestation appears to  
135 be the defining factor causing these abnormalities. SBV infection from 60–180 days in cattle

136 (Wernike et al., 2014) leads to severe dysplastic CNS lesions (Peperkamp et al., 2015). Infection  
137 during late pregnancy, when the CNS and the fetuses own immune system responses are more  
138 developed results in less severe clinical signs such as non-suppurative inflammation in the brain and  
139 spinal cord (Peperkamp et al., 2015). The typical arthrogryposis is thought to be a secondary  
140 clinical sign indicative of neuronal loss, leading to a muscle activity imbalance and a failure of  
141 normal muscle and joint development. This is supported by the fact that the virus is not found in the  
142 skeleton or muscle in fetuses (Bayrou et al., 2014; Peperkamp et al., 2015).

143

144 Reports of early pregnancy loss (presenting as a failure to conceive) were a feature of the  
145 SBV outbreak. SBV infected sheep during the SBV outbreak in Belgium, had a doubling of  
146 abortions compared to non-infected flocks (Saegerman et al., 2014). Similarly, SBV infected flocks  
147 from Ireland to Germany also had a 10–50% reduction in weaning rates reflecting both increased  
148 abortions and increased mortality during early lamb life ( Helmer et al., 2013; Wernike et al.,  
149 2013b; Dominguez et al., 2014; Luttkholt et al., 2014; Barrett et al., 2015; Martinelle et al., 2015;  
150 Toson et al., 2015; Wüthrich et al., 2016). Some studies of affected dairy cattle herds have also  
151 demonstrated a detrimental impact in fertility parameters (including an increase in animals failing to  
152 conceive) during SBV outbreaks (Veldhuis et al., 2014) whereas others did not (Luttkholt et al.,  
153 2014).

154

## 155 **Diagnosis**

156 The European Food Safety Authority released case definitions and diagnostic standards for  
157 SBV, which have been widely adopted by member states of the European Union (EFSA, 2012a,  
158 2012b). Suspect clinical cases include fetuses with two or more signs of arthrogryposis,  
159 hydranencephaly, spinal abnormalities such as kyphosis and scoliosis, joint malformation, limb  
160 paralysis and muscle atrophy (Afonso et al., 2014). Blindness and abnormal behaviour in neonates  
161 are also suspect signs. In adult animals, fever >40 °C, reduced appetite and milk drop (with no other

162 apparent reason) can lead to suspicion of viral infection.

163

164 Virus can be isolated in cell culture. However, RT-qPCR to detect viral RNA was generally  
165 used during the outbreak to confirm viral infection in fetuses or neonates. In adult animals,  
166 seropositivity has been detected by a variety of ELISA-based methods or with virus neutralisation  
167 tests (Loeffen et al., 2012; Breard et al., 2013; Afonso et al., 2014). Problems exist with either  
168 method for confirmation of the causality of the disease. For RT-qPCR assays, there is a narrow  
169 window of time where the virus can be detected in tissue/blood; fetuses with typical clinical signs of  
170 the disease may have cleared the virus before birth and therefore test negative on RT-qPCR. Most  
171 ELISA tests are not able to distinguish between different members of the Simbu serogroup of  
172 viruses, therefore serum neutralisation tests are required to definitively identify which virus an  
173 animal has been exposed to in regions where multiple viruses are circulating (Abutarbush et al.,  
174 2015; Mathew et al., 2015). Although serum neutralisation tests are more specific than ELISA,  
175 they are time consuming to perform and require cell culture facilities. These serological tests can  
176 confirm past infection but cannot give an indication of the timing of that infection in relation to the  
177 birth of an affected fetus (Bouwstra et al., 2013). Testing of the antibody response of the fetus (via  
178 fetal thoracic fluid testing) has been suggested as a more useful test for confirmation of SBV  
179 infection in deformed calves and lambs (De Regge et al., 2013).

180

181 Herd level testing via bulk milk tank sampling was widely used at the height of the outbreak  
182 to confirm the geographical spread of the virus. There are, however, reports of herds with high  
183 values when bulk tank milk was tested by ELISA where the within-herd prevalence of antibodies is  
184 actually low (Tarlinton and Daly, 2013). Individually-sampled milk shows a strong correlation with  
185 serum results from the same animal, potentially providing a non-invasive method of determining  
186 within-herd exposure for dairy farms (Daly et al., 2015). Furthermore, detection of antibodies in  
187 saliva by ELISA provides another non-invasive, fast method to determine prevalence of antibodies



188 (Lazutka et al., 2015).

189

190 **Control**

191 Attempts were made during the initial outbreak to limit midge numbers through  
192 environmental controls (insecticide dipping of animals, breaking up of manure from midge breeding  
193 sites). Chemical treatment of sheep has shown some promise in reducing numbers of midges  
194 (Weiher et al., 2014) however environmental control of midge breeding sites on farms has so far  
195 failed to impact on insect numbers (Harrup et al., 2014). The seemingly high replication efficiency  
196 and spread of SBV in *Culicoides spp.* especially when compared with bluetongue virus (BTV),  
197 (spread by the same main vectors) also limits the use of insect control methods in the control of  
198 SBV (EFSA, 2014; Veronesi et al., 2013)

199

200 There have been three commercial vaccines released against the virus, all of which are  
201 adjuvanted inactivated ('killed') virus vaccines. The first vaccine available was brought to market in  
202 record time under a provisional registration, however the speed of introduction and licencing route  
203 has meant that comprehensive data on efficacy and safety in pregnant animals (a crucial group to  
204 protect) has not been available. In a study of prototype killed virus vaccines, onset of immunity in  
205 cattle and sheep was demonstrated three weeks after the second of two doses given three weeks  
206 apart (Wernike et al., 2013d). This type of vaccine appears to be effective in preventing viral  
207 replication in animals, with sheep protected when challenged 3 weeks after a single dose  
208 (Hechinger et al., 2014). Natural infection has been shown to induce persistent antibodies in  
209 infected cows, lasting at least 36 months (Elbers et al., 2014; Méroc et al., 2015, Wernike et al  
210 2015b).

211

212 Anecdotal reports and the author's observations have indicated that uptake of the  
213 commercial SBV vaccines has been low and the fact that none of the released vaccines are currently

214 available (March 2017) would attest to this. Recent data in England showed that even though half of  
215 124 farmers surveyed suspected cases of SBV on their farm, only 13.7% had vaccinated in 2013,  
216 with that figure falling to 1.6% in 2014. One farm had vaccinated cattle but not sheep (Stokes et al.,  
217 2016). There are a number of potential reasons for a lack of interest from farm managers in  
218 vaccinating against SBV. In our own unpublished data from surveys of UK farms in 2013 only one  
219 farm in 20 was planning on vaccinating for SBV. A recurrent theme in responses was the perception  
220 that SBV “would disappear like bluetongue” usually indicating that European farmers did not feel it  
221 was economically viable to maintain vaccination programmes for intermittent vector borne diseases.  
222 Indeed, in the Netherlands the circulation of the virus in 2013 was <1% with a low number of  
223 seropositive animals (Veldhuis et al., 2015).

224

225         The two non-structural proteins (NSs, NSm) may play a role in viral pathogenesis (Eifan et  
226 al., 2013; Hart et al., 2009). Experimental trials of live virus vaccines with the viral NSs and NSm  
227 protein genes deleted have demonstrated the efficacy and safety of such vaccines (Kraatz et al.,  
228 2015). A crucial advantage of knockout mutants like this includes the ability to develop tests against  
229 the missing proteins to differentiate infected from vaccinated animals, an important issue in  
230 international trade considerations. These vaccines have however not been taken through to full  
231 commercialisation.

232

233         The main other control method that has been advocated, apart from vaccinating before first  
234 mating, has been the moving of mating of sheep flocks and cattle herds to later in the autumn when  
235 midge numbers and virus circulation are lower. This should be effective in limiting reproductive  
236 effects in sheep flocks and cattle herds but is only practical in production systems that practice  
237 block matings (Helmer et al., 2013; Dominguez et al., 2014; Lutikholt et al., 2014; Poskin et al.,  
238 2016).

239

## 240 **Economic impact of SBV**

241 The impact of the initial SBV outbreak on the overall European economy was low (EFSA,  
242 2012a). The cost to individual farm businesses shows great variation depending on whether their  
243 mating practices result in the at-risk gestation period overlapping with peak midge season. Several  
244 recent studies have considered the overall economic impacts of the virus (Dominguez et al., 2014;  
245 Martinelle et al., 2014; Veldhuis et al., 2014; Barrett et al., 2015) and there have been several  
246 economic models produced from this data (Alarcon et al., 2014; Raboisson et al., 2014). The main  
247 impacts of the virus on farm economics can be summed up as milk production losses, reproductive  
248 losses due to abortion and fetal deformity, the cost of purchase of replacement stock to compensate  
249 for reproductive losses, replacement animals not sold, as well as veterinary costs and movement  
250 restrictions (Alarcon et al., 2014).

251

252 One factor the current models have not included is the impact of early reproductive losses as  
253 firm data is still not available on this. The inclusion of these losses would of course add to the  
254 economic impact of the virus for producers. These impacts need to be considered in the light of the  
255 very high variation in impact on individual farms, ranging from negligible to over 50% of losses of  
256 new-born animals (Helmer et al., 2013). It also needs to be considered in the light of the range of  
257 production systems for ruminants in Europe which vary from high genetic value, intensively  
258 managed, indoor housed year round reproduction dairy herds to extensively grazed, low stocking  
259 density, block mated in autumn, sheep flocks.

260

261 One of the main economic impacts of the initial SBV outbreak was the loss of export  
262 markets for bovine genetics (semen, embryos and breeding stock) due to the introduction of trade  
263 barriers from countries free of SBV (60% of countries trading with Europe imposed restrictions). A  
264 decline of 10-20% in trade was observed in addition to the value of pure-bred breeding animal  
265 exports dropping by 20% from 2011 to 2012 (EFSA, 2014). The remaining outcome of economic

266 significance has been the finding that potentially infectious virus is shed intermittently in semen for  
267 up to 3 months after initial infection in a small number of bulls (Hoffmann et al., 2012, 2013;  
268 Ponsart et al., 2014; Schulz et al., 2014; Van Der Poel et al., 2014). This has not been reported for  
269 rams or bucks, however only small numbers of sheep and goats have been examined compared with  
270 cattle. Sexual transmission of the virus has not been reported, however given the importance of  
271 artificial insemination in cattle breeding in developed countries the risk of virus introduction has  
272 resulted in trade bans or testing requirements on semen or embryos from SBV-affected areas  
273 (Hoffmann et al., 2012).

274

275           In the light of the concerns of producers over vaccination cost and benefit and the current  
276 risk and uncertainty over future SBV outbreaks it is worth considering recent data on the economic  
277 impacts of the virus and the cost-benefits of vaccination as a control measure. Vaccination  
278 experience with bluetongue virus has shown that a high rate of vaccination can significantly reduce  
279 virus circulation and reduce the economic impact of the loss of animals (Lazutka et al., 2015). A  
280 brief summary of the range of the costs of the disease versus the cost of vaccination for the main  
281 production types in Europe is presented in Table 1 below.

282

283           These figures would indicate that vaccination would be warranted in most beef cattle herds  
284 and dairy sheep flocks, however in other production systems only those herds in “high risk”  
285 categories, such as a herd of low seropositivity, management systems where gestation and pasture  
286 availability overlaps with peak midge season (Baylis et al., 2010; Alarcon et al., 2014) would  
287 accrue an overall benefit from vaccination against SBV.

288

### 289 **Potential for SBV re-emergence**

290           Other viruses that infect ruminants, such as BTV in Europe, and related *Bunyaviridae* in  
291 Japan and Australia, have shown a pattern of re-emergence when certain conditions are met. It is

292 therefore anticipated that SBV might follow the same pattern of re-emergence. In Japan there are  
293 epidemics of Aino virus every 3-6 years (Tsuda et al., 2004; Kono et al., 2008) as naïve animals  
294 become available. For Akabane virus in Australia there are predictable annual transmission patterns  
295 and outbreaks every 10-15 years, due to expansion or temporary contraction of the vector or  
296 movement of naïve animals.

297

298         Bluetongue virus serotype 8 (BTV-8), which shares the same vector species as SBV,  
299 recently re-emerged in Europe after a period of absence of clinical disease of several years and  
300 declining seropositivity in the resident ruminant population (Sailleau et al., 2015; Bréard et al.,  
301 2016). Loss of SBV immunity has already been seen in Germany with only about 20% of newborn  
302 animals having antibodies (Wernike et al., 2015a). In animals born since the initial outbreak, the  
303 numbers seroconverting have been much lower, 58–65.7% in adult animals and as low as 20.6% in  
304 heifers (Meroc et al., 2015; Wernike et al., 2015b), resulting in a drop of seropositivity (and  
305 presumably immunity). In the UK and Ireland no seroconversions were detected in 2014–15  
306 indicating a presumed absence of the disease there in those years (Collins et al., 2016a; Stokes et  
307 al., 2016).

308         The virus has continued to circulate at a low level in continental Europe with detection in  
309 Germany (Wernike et al., 2015a) and Belgium (Delooz et al., 2016). Evidence of increased  
310 circulation has recently been seen in the Netherlands with outbreaks of diarrhoea in cattle linked to  
311 SBV reported (Promed Mail 2016). Similarly, virus re-circulation has been evident in the UK in  
312 2016 with a number of reports of clinical cases and seroconversion (Unknown, 2016). It is possible  
313 that large scale resurgence could occur when a combination of the number of naïve replacement  
314 stock reaches a critical level together with favourable conditions for the vectors.

315

316         It has also been proposed that local wild ruminant populations may be a reservoir for  
317 arboviruses as BTV virus was detected in red deer in Spain, while livestock was disease free (Ruio-

318 Fons et al., 2014). Similarly, SBV virus has also been found in roe deer (Diaz et al., 2015), the  
319 European bison (Krzysiak et al., 2016) and other species (reviewed in Tarlinton et al., 2013) raising  
320 the prospect of a wild-life SBV reservoir in Europe.

321

322 SBV is not notifiable at the European level, however several individual countries have made  
323 it notifiable (including Germany, France, the Netherlands and Ireland) and hence have maintained  
324 active monitoring programmes. Using milk yield to monitor disease state has been suggested as  
325 syndromic surveillance for several diseases that affect ruminants (Madouasse et al., 2013,2014). In  
326 combination with testing milk for virus-specific antibodies, this could help identify areas where  
327 infection is occurring (Veldhuis et al., 2016).

328

329 In both Australia and Japan arbovirus monitoring programmes of sentinel animals and  
330 midge trapping and testing are in place as early warning systems (Kirkland, 2004; Geoghegan et al.,  
331 2014; Kato et al., 2015) and we, as well as others (Regge, 2016) would suggest that such a system  
332 in Europe would be warranted. In Ireland and France, which have instituted surveillance using  
333 *Culicoides* monitoring and sentinel herds or reporting by sentinel veterinarians this approach has  
334 been successful in detecting circulating virus and new cases in the recent re-emergence (Collins et  
335 al., 2016b, Gache et al., 2017).

336

337 In Japan, sentinel herds are employed in the southernmost islands where the outbreaks are  
338 more likely to begin due to the warmer climate. Several vaccines are available and are deployed  
339 pro-actively if circulation is detected (Kurogi et al. 1979, Kono et al 2008; Kim et al. 2011, Kato et  
340 al., 2015). In Australia, even though there is no currently registered vaccine, the information gained  
341 from the early monitoring and warning systems allows the farmers to make decisions about moving  
342 their herds or delaying mating to avoid the teratogenic consequences of infection (reviewed in  
343 Kirkland, 2015).

344

345           Such a programme Europe-wide would alert livestock holders of the potential for SBV  
346 disease impacts in advance of the main seasonal ruminant breeding activities in summer and autumn  
347 giving producers the opportunity to assess whether vaccination or delay of mating would be  
348 necessary for their herds and flocks. Ideally, improved data on midge abundance, virus circulation  
349 in midges and modelling of long term climate and land use variables that affect midge abundance  
350 would be necessary for advanced warning of the risk of disease, however without a substantial body  
351 of data from long term sentinel monitoring programmes on a continent wide basis such as that  
352 available in Australia (Bishop et al., 2000; Eagles et al., 2014) this cannot happen.

353

354           In addition, the detection of numerous different Simbu-group viruses in the Mediterranean  
355 and Africa has made it clear that there are numerous viruses circulating in the regions where SBV is  
356 likely to have come from. This, combined with the well-studied propensity of this group of viruses  
357 to swap genetic segments (antigenic shift), makes it quite likely that there will be outbreaks of  
358 viruses with similar pathogenesis and epidemiology to SBV in Europe in the near future, making  
359 preparation of diagnostic and vaccine platforms transferrable across this virus group a priority.

360

## 361 **Conclusions**

362           While we now know much more about SBV than when it was initially reported, there are  
363 still a number of long-term uncertainties about the impact of the virus on the European ruminant  
364 herd. Chief among these is the long-term endemic stability of the viruses. From the currently  
365 available data, it is clear that the initial epidemic front of the virus in 2011–12 was the worst case  
366 scenario, with immunologically-naïve animals being exposed for the first time to the virus resulting  
367 in almost 100% seroconversion in some regions. Since 2013–14, there has been continuing low  
368 level circulation of SBV in Western Europe and overall herd immunity (variable to begin with) has

369 dropped. This unfortunately increases the likelihood of repeated epidemic outbreaks, particularly in  
370 years when high midge numbers and susceptible ruminants coincide.

371

## 372 **Conflict of interest statement**

373 None of the authors of this paper has a financial or personal relationship with other people or  
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375

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379

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**Table 1**

Production System	Cost range of disease £/1000 head	Cost benefit of vaccination	Likelihood of use
Dairy cattle	8200 to 51400	-5720 to 37480	High risk only
Beef cattle	18000 to 30650	4080 to 16730	Yes
Lamb production	4750 to 20850	-9170 to 7000	High risk only
Dairy Sheep	10340 to 29,810	3580 to 15890	Yes

896 Cost of the disease per 1000 animal vs. cost benefit of vaccination (adapted from Raboisson et al.  
897 (2014). Costs are shown for high risk and low risk cases and exclude labour costs. Vaccination cost  
898 assumed at UK £13.92 per head (£13920 per herd) (Price as of Dec 2015 “farmacy” website <sup>1</sup>)  
899 (£1UK= approximately US \$1.23, € 1.16 as of 18th Nov 2016)

<sup>1</sup> “Farmacy” website: <http://www.farmacy.co.uk/categories/575-schmallenberg> (accessed 22nd March 2017)