



LOOK OUT FOR

- Red tape cuts in Wales **p13**
- NFU angry at rock star's claims **p14**
- Herd all but wiped out by TB **p16**

Deadly virus casts shadow over lambing

By Philip Case and Aly Balsom

More outbreaks of a deadly virus that is causing deformities in newborn livestock are expected after veterinary experts confirmed the disease in early lambing flocks.

The Schmallenberg virus, which has been shown to wipe out as much as 25% of newborn lambs, has so far been confirmed on 11 sheep farms in the UK.

This week three new cases were found in Suffolk, two in Essex and another one in Norfolk – and a first case was found in Kent.

The disease, which was first identified in November last year in Germany, infects sheep, cattle and goats. But only sheep farms have been infected in Britain.

Because the virus has so far only

*** Schmallenberg is a potential time bomb because the damage would have been already been done in the midge season**

Dave Feneley

spread to southern and eastern counties in England, vets believe it is likely a midge-borne virus spread from central Europe in the mild conditions of last autumn.

A spokesman for the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency said: "These counties are in the area already identified as potentially at risk from infected midges being blown across the Channel from affected areas in Europe.

"We, therefore, suspect this to be the most likely cause of transmission.

"As surveillance continues and the lambing season progresses we would expect further cases." Last week, *Farmers Weekly* revealed that the country's first cases had been found in two sheep flocks, two in Norfolk, one in Suffolk and another in East Sussex.

The disease causes birth defects in offspring, including deformation of the head, neck, limbs and blindness. There is no evidence to suggest the virus causes sickness in humans.

The virus could be widespread in Norfolk and may have gone undetected for weeks in early-lambing flocks, said vet Dave Feneley of Wensum Valley Vets, Fakenham.

"Schmallenberg is a potential time bomb, because the damage would have already been done in the midge season," he said.

"We feel the problem could be quite widespread in the area."

Small farmer Becky Whatley, of Norfolk, posted on FWi that she had lost about 50% of her lambs to what looked Schmallenberg.

She was concerned about greater loss in animals and money before lambing ends.

Contract lamber Sally Clay, from East Sussex, said: "We have had 12 badly deformed lambs born, but we have had a lot more lambs missing from triplets and twins. We have had quite a few stillborns too.

"We are very worried about lambing this kind of lamb. It's just been very difficult."

Although the disease is not notifiable, the NFU has urged farmers to remain highly vigilant and report any suspected cases to the AHVLA or the SAC for testing.

In continental Europe, the virus is spreading fast. Germany has 147 confirmed cases – a seven-fold increase in the last week. The Netherlands has 87 confirmed cases with 71 still under investigation. Belgium has recorded 62 incidences. However, France remains at two.

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JONATHAN PAGE

VACCINE 'STILL YEARS AWAY'

* A vaccine to control the Schmallenberg virus is at least two years away, according to the British Veterinary Association.

BVA president Carl Padgett told *Farmers Weekly* that the virus was completely new.

"We would be starting, roughly, from scratch with the development of a vaccine," Mr Padgett said.

"It took 18 months to two years to bring the bluetongue vaccine to market.

"The UK was helped by the fact that the disease took many months for the midge to spread the disease from the south of France. We don't have that extra time with Schmallenberg – it is already here," Mr Padgett said.

Any treatment for the virus would have to be developed, then field-tested in animals, he explained.

These animals would then have to go through pregnancy before we could assess how effective the

treatment was and rule out any side effects, he said.

After that the vaccine has to be manufactured and distributed.

"We only achieved the rapid response to bluetongue because there was huge financial support from governments across Europe.

"So the length of time to create a treatment also depends on the level of financial support available from the government," Mr Padgett said.

Tracks vs Tyres

Weather prompts switch

Machinery p66-68



Russia bans livestock imports over disease

By Philip Case

Russia has imposed a temporary ban on cattle and small livestock imports from the UK following the spread of the Schmallenberg virus (SBV).

The ban, imposed by the Russian government's food safety and sanitary watchdog, includes live animals from other European countries where the virus is prevalent. Russia had already been restricting imports from Britain.

Meanwhile, in a separate move, the European Union's food safety watchdog said on Tuesday (31

January) that it had been asked to assess the health risks posed by the new virus.

"The European Commission has requested urgent scientific and technical assistance for possible risks resulting from the Schmallenberg virus," the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) said in a statement.

EFSA will provide the commission and EU governments with likely scenarios on how the insect-borne virus could affect livestock in the coming months, and will also assess possible risks to human health, the statement said.

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LOCATION OF UK SCHMALLEMBERG CASES



WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE VIRUS:

- * Schmallenberg is a viral disease affecting sheep, cattle and goats
- * Cases confirmed in Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, France and UK
- * Disease appears to be spread by midges
- * Problem only seen in sheep in UK so far
- * Limited symptoms in adult animals but causes abortions and deformities in calves and lambs
- * Some sheep producers reporting losses of up to 25%
- * Appears to be less severe for cattle with farmers losing perhaps one or two calves
- * No vaccine or treatment available
- * No evidence that transmissible to humans but investigations ongoing



Schmallenberg Virus

Special report

Vet viewpoint

DEFRA chief vet Nigel Gibbens and BVA president Carl Padgett call for farmers to report cases **p8**

Farmer viewpoint

Farmers across Europe provide an insight into the disease **p10**

Questions answered

FAQs on the virus answered **p38**

Online



Video

Sussex farm losing 10% of lambs to deformities.

Online report

Updates on news, facts, figures and DEFRA technical reports. You can also take part in a forum discussion on the disease.

Coveritlive

9 Feb 6.30pm Join a live discussion with vets and a farmer whose farm has succumbed to the disease

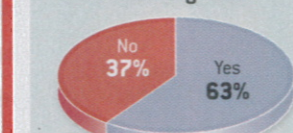
www.fwi.co.uk/schmallenberg

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Every week you can take part in a *Farmers Weekly* poll.

Online this week we asked:

* Are you worried about the Schmallenberg virus?



This week's question is

* Are you optimistic about your farm's future?

Answer "Yes", or "No".

To vote, log on to www.fwi.co.uk or fax 020 8652 4005.

Result in next week's issue.