

New disease hits Dutch, German livestock

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A new livestock disease causing deformities at birth has been detected in at least five European countries, including the Netherlands and Germany, a Dutch agriculture ministry spokesman said Thursday.

"It has been detected on 76 farms in the Netherlands, mainly among [sheep](#), but also goats and cattle," Coen Gelinck said, adding that the Schmallenberg [virus](#) was also spotted in Germany, Belgium and Britain.

France also reported its first case on Thursday.

Named after the the German town where it was first detected in November, Schmallenberg affected 51 German farms mainly in the North Rhine-Westphalia state, the German Friedrich-Loeffler Institute for animal health research said.

Across the border in eastern France authorities said Schmallenberg had been detected for the first time on a sheep farm in Lorraine and suspect cases elsewhere were being investigated.

The [disease](#), believed to be carried by gnats, causes fever and [diarrhoea](#) among adult animals and cannot be transmitted from one animal to another, said Gelinck. There is presently no vaccine for Schmallenberg.

The disease however can be transmitted to sheep, goat and cattle embryos leading to still births or deformities causing death soon after birth, the spokesman said.

"This is a virus similar to others previously detected in Australia and South America," the spokesman for a Dutch federation representing agriculture, cattle and flower farmers, Jack Luiten told AFP.

"Until now there are many indications that the virus cannot be transmitted to humans," Luiten added.

Dutch farmers have been ordered to report all birth deformities to authorities since December 20.

Germany's food, agriculture and [consumer protection](#) ministry said it would by "late March" set up a system of mandatory reporting after approval by the German senate.

Earlier this week in Brussels, Germany argued for a similar system to be set up at the European level.

Moscow in mid-January suspended sheep and goat imports from the Netherlands because of the disease. [Dutch](#) meat exports to Russia are regarded as "marginal", Gelinck said.

China and Argentina asked for more information on the virus in mid-January, he added.

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