

Russia to resume buying Dutch, Belgian vegetables

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(AP) -- Russia is ending a blanket ban on vegetable imports from the European Union put in place over fears of E. coli infection, starting with the Netherlands and Belgium, the nation's top consumer rights watchdog said Tuesday.

Shipments were allowed to resume Tuesday, the agency said, following a 26-day ban intended to prevent an E. coli outbreak centered on Germany from spreading east. Germany reported one more death in the outbreak, taking the total to at least 47, but infections have declined significantly over recent weeks.

The EU has called Russia's ban disproportionate and the dispute has clouded Russia's talks on accession to the World Trade Organization.

The Russian consumer protection agency didn't say when imports of vegetables from other EU nations will resume, but added that the Czech Republic, Denmark, Lithuania, Spain and Poland are on the waiting list.

Russia and the EU have reached agreement on safety certification, and agency chief Gennady Onishchenko said that every shipment of vegetables must be accompanied by an individual certificates guaranteeing its safety.

Russia is the last major economy that isn't a member of the WTO, the international free-trade body, and accession to it is crucial to a broader partnership agreement the European Union wants to establish with

Russia.

Meanwhile Tuesday, the Robert Koch Institute, Germany's disease control center, said 47 deaths have now been reported in the country. One person has died in Sweden and officials say one death in the U.S. may be linked to the outbreak.

New infections have declined significantly over recent weeks but overall numbers are still rising due to delays in notification.

The disease control center says 3,901 people have been reported sick in Germany - including 838 suffering from a complication that can lead to kidney failure. A further 119 cases have been reported in 15 other countries.

The source has been traced to a sprout farm in northern Germany. It's unclear how the sprouts were contaminated.

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