

France investigates spike in babies born with arm defects

October 21 2018

France's health minister on Sunday announced a new investigation into the births of several babies with upper limb defects in various parts of the country in recent years, saying it was "unacceptable" no cause had been found.

Health Minister Agnes Buzyn said she and her environment counterpart Francois de Rugy had decided to look more closely at what caused 14 babies to be born with stunted or missing arms since 2007, two weeks after [health authorities](#) said they had failed to find an explanation.

The cases have been concentrated in three French "departments" or administrative areas —Ain near the Swiss border, which had seven cases between 2009 and 2014, Brittany on the West coast which had four cases between 2011 and 2013, and Loire-Atlantique, south of Brittany, which had three cases in 2007-2008.

In an October 4 report France's public health agency said that while the number of cases in the Ain area were not above the national average the numbers in Brittany and Loire-Atlantique were statistically "excessive".

But it said it found no "common exposure" to substances that could explain them.

Fewer than 150 babies are born each year in France with upper limb defects, which occur when part of, or the entire arm, fails to form completely during pregnancy.

While the cause of the defects are unknown, research has shown that exposure of the mother to certain chemicals or medication during the pregnancy can increase the risk.

Buzyn told LCI channel that environmental experts would now join [health](#) experts in investigating the [cases](#) to try to shed light on the phenomenon.

"We cannot content ourselves with saying we didn't find the case, that's unacceptable," she said.

In the 1950s and 1960s, thousands of [babies](#) around the world were born with missing or stunted limbs linked to the use of the drug thalidomide, which was used to treat nausea in pregnant women. It was banned in the 1960s.

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