

Schmallenberg Virus

Schmallenberg virus was first detected in August 2011 within Germany, spreading to the Netherlands, Belgium and now the UK. The number of premises with confirmed cases of Schmallenberg increases daily with the majority of cases of Schmallenberg reported within the UK to date having been diagnosed in sheep.

Schmallenberg is a viral disease affecting cattle, sheep and goats. In adult cattle the disease has been associated with symptoms including milk drop, fever, loss of appetite, diarrhoea and late abortion or birth defects in calves, lambs and kids.

The disease often abbreviated to SBV, is not notifiable and there are currently no implications to trade or movement barriers.



A Lamb born dead with arthrogryposis, showing a twisted spine and abnormally flexed deformed legs. Image courtesy of the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA).



B Lamb born alive and quickly dispatched with relatively mild signs - flexed front left and deformities to back feet (C). Its twin was unaffected.



D/E Lambs born with all four legs flexed and twisted.



The virus appears to belong to a group of viruses spread by insect vectors, principally midges and mosquitoes. The exact cause of transmission within UK animals is not known, however as Norfolk, Suffolk, East Sussex, Essex and Kent were counties identified as potentially at risk from wind blown infected European midges, the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories (AHVLA) suspect this is the most likely cause of transmission.

Unfortunately there is currently no treatment or vaccine for animals infected with the Schmallenberg virus but farmers can help the situation by:

- Be extra vigilant and support the gathering of information by reporting new-born limb and brain defects to your veterinary practice. It is important that cases are reported so that the true number of cases can be monitored.
- Farmers should consider post-mortem testing. Currently Defra are covering the costs of testing for Schmallenberg Virus. Once a case has been confirmed there is no need to send further samples from that farm.
- Producers should contact the AHVLA or the SAC in Scotland via their vet.

- Any imports of live animals from EU regions affected by Schmallenberg virus should be undertaken in strict consultation with your vet.
- Although the virus can be transmitted during periods of insect activity clinical signs may not be evident until later in the season. Always assess the risks of bringing stock onto your farm with your vet.
- Be extra vigilant. Remember to practice highest possible levels of biosecurity and quarantine/separation whenever bringing new animals on site. Discuss bio-security measures with your vet.
- There is no Schmallenberg virus vaccine. To improve the ability of animals to counter attack the disease farmers should promote general stock health and vitality by:
 - providing good nutrition
 - optimising mineral and trace element levels
 - controlling internal and external parasites.

Vet Viewpoint



■ Toby Kemble, Wensum Valley Veterinary Surgeons, Norfolk

“Symptoms are most obvious in newborn lambs and calves, with infected adults often showing few signs, the cases announced so far might just be the tip of the iceberg. So far the incidence of deformities has ranged from one percent in some flocks to twenty five percent in others within our practice. We’re only going to know the extent of the disease once people have started lambing and calving. The cattle and sheep most at risk of foetal infection are those that were in-lamb or in-calf last autumn when midges were still circulating so sheep intended for later lambing could be more likely to escape the virus.”

■ Steve Trickey, Chapelfield Veterinary Partnership, Norfolk



“There have been increased cases of dystocia (difficult births) as a result of deformed foetuses and attention should be paid to the welfare of animals using pain relief and antibiotics when appropriate. New born, live animals, unable to stand because of limb deformities should be humanely dispatched as soon as possible.”

Pictured right: This lamb had to be delivered by caesarian and was born alive. Note the overlong back legs.



Further Information

For regular updates on the disease go to www.defra.gov.uk and enter Schmallenberg in the Defra website search bar. Please contact your local vet if you require further guidance or information.