

# French sheep farmers fret over bluetongue outbreak

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French authorities reported Thursday more than 20 suspected cases of bluetongue virus in sheep, raising fears a potentially fatal outbreak after hundreds of animals were infected in neighboring Belgium.

Regional authorities in the Nord department, which borders Belgium, revealed on Wednesday that the first French case of bluetongue virus serotype 3 (BTV-3) was confirmed on Monday in Marpent.

There are now 22 suspected cases, the region's prefecture said.

"Each time there is a suspicion, a vet is sent out. Samples are taken and analyzes carried out", the regional authorities said, adding that "in the event of contamination, the animal must be isolated and disinfected".

Suspicions have arisen on two or three [farms](#) in the Nord and three or four in the Aisne, all of which are "currently being analyzed", said Simon Ammeux, president of the regional federation of the FNSEA farming union.

He also reported two suspected [outbreaks](#) in Seine-et-Marne.

In Belgium, the Belgian Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC) confirmed there were 308 cases of bluetongue in the country.

"Because bluetongue is spread by midges, it is not possible to control the spread of the virus. The best method of protection is vaccination," the agency said.

The mortality rate is between 10 and 30 percent, the FASFC noted, adding that sick animals and also those that recover from the virus can become less productive.

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