Schmallenberg Virus

What is Schmallenberg Virus?

Schmallenberg Virus is a new livestock disease that has been found in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. Since it is a newly identified virus, there are many aspects of the disease that are still to be researched but it is thought to be an Orthobunyavirus which are known to cause other animal diseases. It is assumed that the new strain of the virus has arisen from the interaction of genetic material between existing Orthobunyaviruses.

So far in the UK, the Schmallenberg Virus has mainly been detected in sheep, but it has also affected cattle and has been identified in goats in other European countries. The virus was named after the German town Schmallengerg, where it was first found.

The virus is likely to be spread by biting vectors such as midges, and it is still unknown if there is any potential for direct transmission from one animal to another. Risk to human health from Schmallenberg virus is not certain but it is unlikely. Therefore, sensible hygiene is encouraged when working with livestock and aborted material.

Diagnosis

Although Schmallenberg Virus is not a notifiable disease, farmers are recommended to contact their veterinary surgeon of any cases of ruminant neonates or foetuses that are stillborn, malformed or showing nervous disease.

In cattle, the disease had been associated with a decrease in milk yield, mild to moderate fever, diarrhoea, loss of appetite and loss of body condition. In new born animals and fetuses, the disease is characterised by body malformations such as bent limbs, brain or nervous deformities and spinal damage. The stage if pregnancy when the infection occurs determines the extent and characteristics of the deformation. Some animals maybe born that appear normal, but may be affected by blindness, lack of co-ordination, unable to suck or prone to fits.

Treatment

Since Schmallenberg virus is a new disease, there is currently no treatment or vaccine available until further research has been carried out to determine appropriate control measures.