

Preliminary Outbreak Assessment #3

Sheep and goat pox in Europe

26 October 2023

Disease report

On 25 October 2023, the UK CVO (Chief Veterinary Officer) received confirmation that there has been an outbreak of sheep and goat pox (SGP) in the Regional Unit of Lesvos, Greece. One outbreak has been confirmed at this time with only one sheep being affected out of the herd of 447 sheep. Surveillance checks were being carried out after reports in Izmir and Canakkale in Türkiye and the animals were displaying clinical signs (fever, weight loss, depression, and red papules on the lower abdomen). All required control measures have been implemented and immediate notifications are being made to EU Member States. [Goat and sheep smallpox outbreaks on the border with Turkey, Greece is on alert \(tridge.com\)](#) [Greece on alert due to Sheep and Goat Pox at the border with Türkiye](#)

On 16 September 2023, Bulgaria reported an immediate notification of SGP to WOA. 4 animals tested positive for SGP on the farm, out of a flock of 225. The 4 animals were displaying clinical signs such as nasal mucous discharge, popular rashes on the muzzle and other parts of their bodies. This was in the region of Burgas where all restricted zones and control measures have been implemented. [WAHIS \(woah.org\)](#)

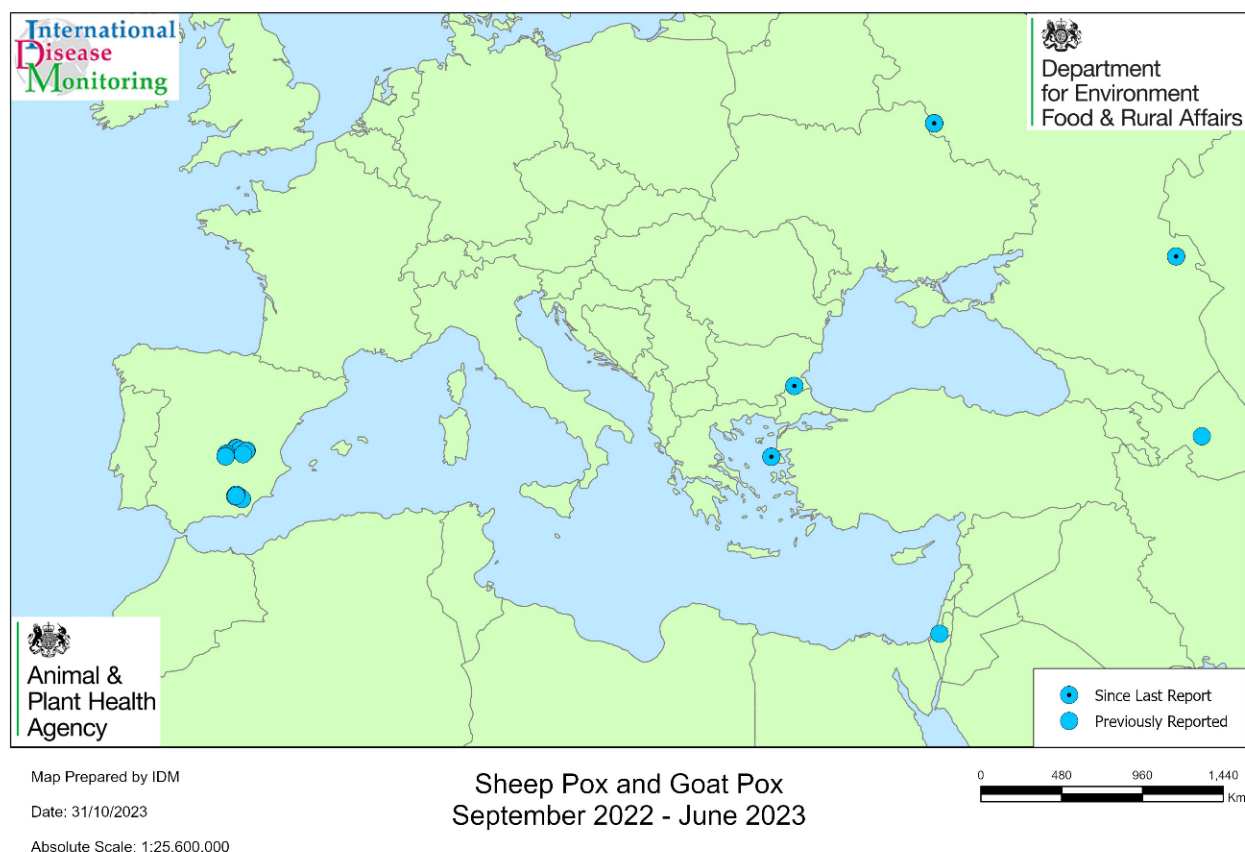


Figure 1: Map showing Sheep and goat pox outbreaks from September 2022 to June 2023 in Europe.

Situation assessment

This is the fourth report of SGP in a European Union Member State since the introduction of SGP into Spain in September 2022. ([6 June 2023: Sheep and goat pox in Europe \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/publishing.service.gov.uk/6-June-2023-Sheep-and-goat-pox-in-Europe)). SGP is a viral disease that generally only affects sheep and goats. Usually, the disease is transmitted by direct contact between animals in pens, in groups, or at gatherings for example at pasture or at markets. It can also be transmitted through inhalation of aerosols of saliva, nasal, respiratory and conjunctival secretions. Transmission by indirect contact with contaminated environments and fomites, including wool and hair is possible, but less frequent than direct transmission (Sprygin et al. 2019). Indirect transmission through contaminated vehicles, bedding, fodder or animal products (such as wool) is also possible. Virus is abundant in skin lesions and scabs and is viable for months in the environment (Kitching 2004; Bowden et al. 2008). SGPV can also be transmitted mechanically by biting insects such as stable flies (Bhanuprakash et al. 2006).

Media reports of sheep pox outbreaks in Cyprus are limited to the north of the country. It is unclear where these outbreaks are, or the number, as they have yet to be reported to the World Organisation of Animal Health (WOAH). Vaccination of animals in northern regions using 20,000 vaccine doses supplied by Türkiye has

reportedly begun, with vaccines ready to be deployed by the European Commission prepared to supply more if needed (Cyprus Mail, 2023b). Plans in the event that disease spreads to the south have been prepared. Vaccination against SGP is currently prohibited in the EU, however it may be authorised under certain conditions.

Bulgaria have listed their restriction measures including a 3km protection zone (PZ), a 10km surveillance zone (SZ), and a further restricted zone. Within the protection and surveillance zones, clinical inspections and sampling will be carried out and in the case of suspicion, this will also happen in the further restricted zone. Possible sources of infection include illegal movement of animals, wildlife, movement of animals crossing the border, infected equipment or other human mediated routes. Control measures within the PZ and SZ include indoor keeping of susceptible animals, movement restriction of animals, germinal products, and animal by-products (ABP), prohibition on fairs, markets, exhibitions and other concentrations of livestock. Movements of animals kept in the further restricted zone to a destination outside of it, may be authorised only for immediate slaughter to a slaughterhouse located within the territory of Bulgaria. For a map of the further restricted zone in Bulgaria, please see slide 3 in the PAFF presentation on Sheep pox virus outbreak and control measures in Bulgaria. [PowerPoint Presentation \(europa.eu\)](#)

There have been no further outbreaks of SGP in Spain since 17 May 2023. See Table 1 for an overview of outbreaks per month in Spain over 2022 and 2023. On 26 September 2023, a year after the first reports of SGP, the EU recognised Spain as disease free. Spain has lifted movement restrictions on livestock and all restriction zones have been lifted. Spain has not applied to Great Britain for disease freedom and import restrictions are still currently in place for live animals, germplasm and fresh or chilled skins and hides.

	Sep 2022	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Jan 2023	Feb 2023	Mar 2023	Apr 2023	May 2023	Total
Andalucía	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Almería	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Granada	2	7	3	0	0	0	0	0	12
Castilla - La Mancha	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Ciudad Real	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	4
Cuenca	2	6	2	2	0	0	0	1	13
Total	4	13	6	2	1	2	1	1	30

Table 1 Sheep and goat pox outbreaks in Spain showing the number of WOA reports in each month and the outbreak locations.

According to available ADIS summaries, there have been over 100 outbreaks of SGP in Türkiye to date in 2023 (ADIS, 2023). These have not been reported on WOA, but [media reports from Greece](#) have commented on the close proximity of reports in Türkiye.

SGP could be introduced to Great Britain through live animals, sheep skins and hides, and through sheep dairy products and wool contaminated with infected skin

cells. However, the tanning process in skins and pasteurisation in dairy products will inactivate the virus.

Conclusions

One outbreak of sheep pox goat pox has occurred in both Greece and Bulgaria and multiple outbreaks were reported in Northern Cyprus in May 2023, while the situation in Spain has been improving, with no detections reported to WOAHP since 17 May 2023.

There have been no imports of live sheep or goats and untreated wool or hides from Greece however, there have been 3 consignments of ABP imported in August 2023, but the species have not been defined. There have also been no imports of live sheep or goats from Bulgaria since July 2023, and no untreated wool or hides since 2022. While no live sheep or goats have been imported from Cyprus or Spain, importation of treated wool occurs monthly from Spain. Based on the sporadic nature of the outbreaks in the east of Europe and the limited trade allowed in live animals, the risk of introduction of SGP to the UK through all pathways is currently considered to be LOW.

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