

Preliminary Outbreak Assessment #4

Sheep and Goat pox in Europe

12 September 2024

Disease report

Outbreaks of sheep and goat pox (SGP) have been reported to WOA (World Organisation for Animal Health) by Bulgaria for the first time since the last outbreak in September 2023. Greece reported six outbreaks in Thessaly and Central Greece over December 2023 and January 2024. Greece has since reported 25 outbreaks in the Macedonia and Thrace region in August and September which are the first outbreaks since the [lifting of disease controls on 30 June 2024](#). In Spain, since the last outbreak of SGP in May 2023, the country has self-declared disease freedom to WOA in November 2023. Previous outbreak assessments are available online to view with other [reports](#).

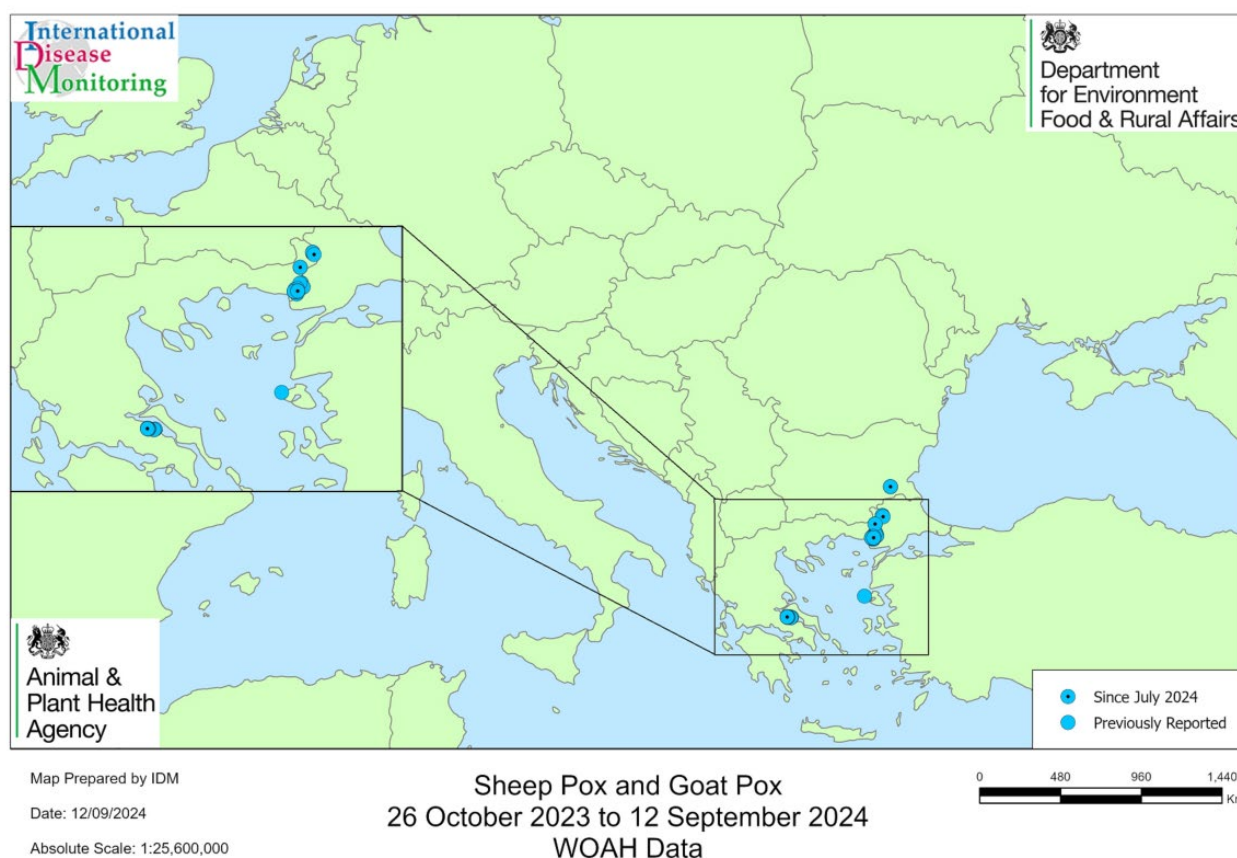


Figure 1: Map showing Sheep and goat pox outbreaks from 26 October 2023 to 12 September 2024.

Situation assessment

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).

Bulgaria

On 04 September 2024, Bulgaria made an immediate notification to WOA of an outbreak of SGP. The outbreak occurred in Yambol, south Bulgaria, around 15km away from the border with Greece. The source of introduction is currently unknown. The farm housed 135 sheep, which have all been culled. The farm has been placed under movement restrictions, with a 3km protection zone and 10km surveillance zone being established. [According to the BFSA](#), the animals were displaying clinical signs, and an epidemiological study is being undertaken.

Greece

Since our last report on 26 October 2023, Greece lifted measures relating to previous outbreaks of SGP, with the date of the last outbreak being 07 March 2024. However, in December 2023 and January 2024, Greece reported six outbreaks to WOA in Thessaly and Central Greece. In August, Greece reported ten outbreaks in East Macedonia and Thrace. The herds affected were predominately sheep herds with three herds being mixed both sheep and goats. In September, Greece has reported 15 further outbreaks, all in East Macedonia and Thrace. Measures such as zoning, stamping out of animals, cleaning and disinfection, enforcement of biosecurity measures and surveillance have been implemented. These outbreaks were located along the border with Türkiye. However, after media speculation that the virus spread into Greece from Türkiye, Turkish Consul General, Aykut Ünal, wrote to the [news company a letter](#) stating that it is highly unlikely that the virus originated in Türkiye. In the letter, he noted that small ruminants in the region across the border are regularly vaccinated and the movement of animals and products within zones are controlled. Thrace has been free from SGP since July 2022 and there are requirements for vaccination and movement controls. Vaccination for SGP is regularly practiced in Türkiye, however, the use of SGP vaccines is prohibited under EU law.

Türkiye

According to [ADIS summaries](#), Türkiye have continued to report outbreaks of SGP throughout 2024 with a total of 56 outbreaks as of 04 September 2024. Türkiye reported seven breakouts in May, three in June, and two in July. Outbreaks have been reported all over the country..

Spain

In November 2023, Spain [self-declared disease freedom from SGP to WOA](#)H. The last outbreak was reported on 17 May 2023. Within the report, the source of infection was not concluded but was suspected to have entered via temporary workers or transport vehicles from infected countries. After undertaking sequencing, the virus contained surface proteins that had previously been detected in isolates of the virus from Morocco, Egypt and Türkiye. Once disease was introduced, it is thought that poor biosecurity on farms with common grazing areas was the biggest factor in spread of the disease. Reinforcement of biosecurity, raising awareness of the disease, active and passive surveillance, and enforcement of traceability in the sheep sector were noted to have helped eradicate the disease from Spain.

Conclusions

Although the source of introduction of SGP into Bulgaria and Greece is inconclusive, they are the only two countries within the EU that have reported SGP this year. The situation in Spain has been resolved, with no further detections since May 2023. Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) have since recognised country freedom from both Spain and Bulgaria, lifting the restrictions on the import of ovine and caprine live animals and germplasm.

There have been no imports of live sheep or goats, fresh or chilled skins or hides or germplasm from Bulgaria. Additionally, there haven't been any from Greece due to imports being suspended in October 2023 in response to previous SGP outbreaks. There is a safeguard declaration in place to restrict fresh or chilled skins and hides from sheep and goats and restrictions are still in place for imports of live sheep and goats, and ovine and caprine germplasm from Greece. 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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