

Preliminary Outbreak Assessment

Rabies in a dog in Germany

18 February 2026

Disease report

On 13 February 2026, Germany notified the World Organisation of Animal Health (WOAH) of a rabies case in a dog in Hochdorf-Assenheim, in the Dannstadt-Schauernheim district, approximately 10 km south-west of Mannheim. Based on media reports, the dog was imported from Russia via a Latvian border control post as part of a commercial shipment of 24 cats and dogs from a rescue charity. According to the accompanying documents, it had been chipped and vaccinated against rabies and was almost 8-months old. The dog died in quarantine, following behavioural problems on 25 January 2026. However, post-mortem examination revealed that it was younger than stated when it entered the EU, making this an illegal import (WOAH, 2026). There are no reports of the dog biting any people or other animals, and, to date, there have been no epidemiologically linked reports.

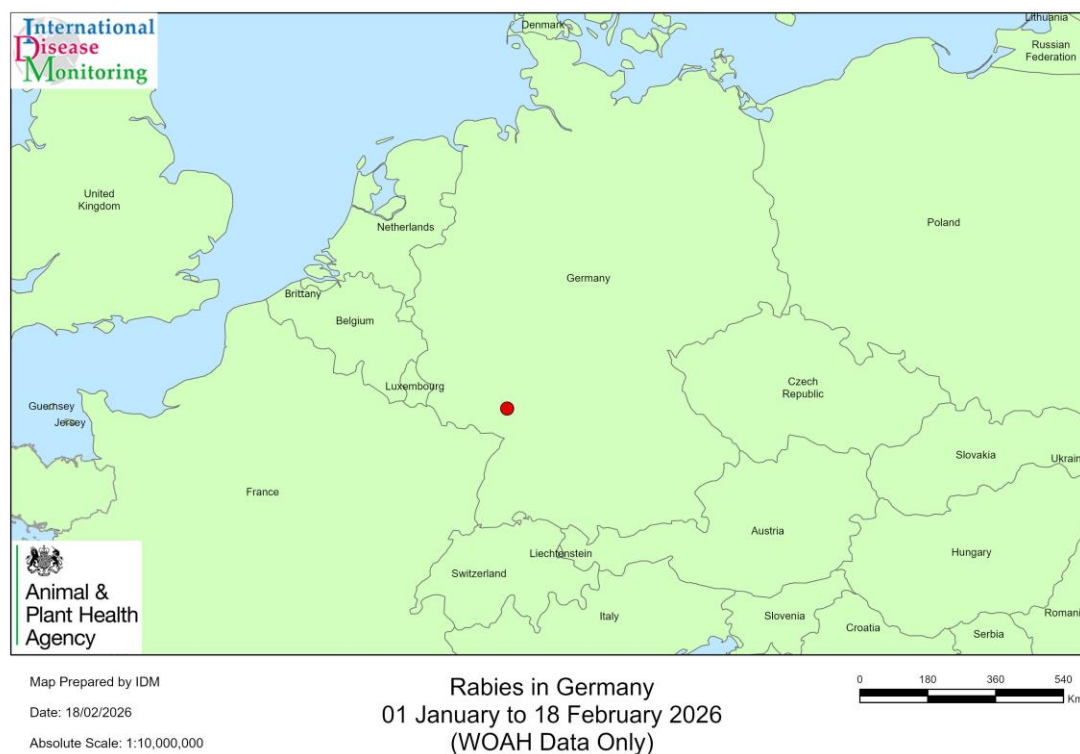


Figure 1. Rabies disease reports within the map area shown between 1 January 2026 and 18 February 2026 (WOAH, 2026).

Situation assessment

Rabies is a severe, usually fatal, viral disease that affects the central nervous system of mammals, including humans, wildlife, and domestic species, such as cats and dogs. It occurs on every continent, except Antarctica (WHO, 2024). After an incubation period lasting from approximately 2 weeks to 6 months or more, rabies is transmitted from animal to animal in saliva, typically through a bite, scratch or contact with mucosa (CFSPH, 2021).

Germany was initially recognised as free from terrestrial rabies (rabies in ground-dwelling animals) in 2008. This case is the first to be reported in Germany since the detection of rabies in an illegally imported dog in 2021, after which rabies-free status was reconfirmed in 2024 (WOAH, 2026). Russia, on the other hand, is not free of rabies and therefore it is reasonable to consider the dog was infected prior to leaving Russia.

Dogs, cats and ferrets may be imported as commercial consignments to the EU from listed non-EU countries, provided certain health conditions are met (Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/692). Namely, animals must be individually identified by an injectable transponder and vaccinated against rabies at least 21 days before dispatch to the EU. The animal must also be at least 12 weeks old at the time of vaccination, and this must be recorded in their animal health certificate. Additionally, for certain countries, including Russia, a rabies antibody test must be carried out at least 30 days after primary vaccination. In this test, a neutralising antibody level of at least 0.5 IU per ml must be achieved, the minimum post-vaccination antibody level. This test helps to mitigate against the movement of any animals where an effective antibody level has not been reached after primary vaccination (Wallace et al. 2017). Prior to travel (<48 hours), the animals should receive a veterinary check. Animals may be gathered in an assembly centre prior to movement only if that establishment is approved by the country of origin (Art 73(2) of Commission Delegated Regulation 2020/692) and the same applies to animals coming from a shelter (Art 73(3)).

According to the documentation accompanying the infected dog in Germany, these conditions had been met. Rabies vaccination is known to be less effective in dogs below 16 weeks of age (Wallace et al. 2017), so it may not prevent an animal becoming infected if exposed, and vaccination cannot prevent rabies disease from developing if an animal is already infected and incubating disease. The available rabies serology test confirmed the effectiveness of the dog's rabies vaccination (WOAH, 2026). However, post-mortem examination of the dog indicated it was younger than the approximately 8-months it was reported to be when entering the EU. According to media reports, it is unclear if the animal's vaccination and antibody test records were genuine, but falsification of such records has previously been responsible for the introduction of canine rabies virus variant-infected dogs into rabies-free areas (Wallace et al., 2017). Alternatively, the dog may have already been incubating rabies prior to vaccination or been infected after vaccination, prior

to, or in the absence of, a protective response being raised. German authorities are currently investigating this further.

Impact for Great Britain

The UK has been free from terrestrial rabies since 1922 (GOV.UK, 2022). Terrestrial animals with rabies are imported periodically, the last of which was in 2008 in a puppy from Sri Lanka (GOV.UK, 2025). According to information received from the European Commission, several cats and dogs from the same consignment were imported to other EU member states and European countries. Following tracing activities, there is no indication that any of the contact animals have been imported to Great Britain.

The occurrence of this case, despite Germany's rabies-free status, demonstrates that there remains some residual risk to rabies-free countries from illegally imported animals, where pre-travel preparations have not been undertaken. Indeed, two quantitative risk assessments have shown there is a low annual likelihood of rabies being introduced into the UK through movement of significant numbers of ill-prepared or illegally imported pet dogs and cats, in the absence of additional checks and control measures (Goddard et al. 2012, Berriman et al. 2018). This is mitigated by the import requirements for Great Britain, including additional checks. Pets imported to Great Britain must be vaccinated at no younger than 12 weeks old and microchipped before or at the same time as their vaccination. If coming from certain non-EU countries, such as Russia, rabies antibody tests are also necessary (GOV.UK). An EFSA opinion into the effectiveness for post-rabies vaccination waiting periods was carried out in 2022, highlighting the importance of 90 days, as opposed to a shorter period.

On 17 February 2026, the Latvian Food and Veterinary Service urged Latvian residents to refrain from purchasing dogs, cats or ferrets from Russia and Belarus, as they do not consider this safe (Latvian Public Media).

Conclusion

This outbreak concerns the case of a dog that was illegally imported to the EU, from a non-EU country under a commercial cats, dogs and ferrets certificate. Due to discrepancies with the age of the dog, and despite an apparently acceptable rabies vaccination record, it is considered an illegal consignment (WOAH, 2026). The other animals present in the consignment have still to be traced, but it is believed none were consigned to the UK. It will be important to understand whether those other animals were present at the same shelter or gathered in the same assembly centre to assess their level of contact with the infected dog, or a common source of rabies virus.

Following this single animal case in Germany, we consider the risk of rabies virus introduction into Great Britain to be **very low** (event is very rare but cannot be excluded). While it would appear none of the animals listed in the total consignment were moved to the UK as commercial movements, it is more difficult to check cats and dogs which travel as non-commercial animals. However, this disease report emphasises how important it is to ensure that proper protocol is followed when

preparing pets for travel and highlights the importance of vaccination at an appropriate age. Moreover, even when procedure has been followed, careful consideration and vigilance should be displayed when importing any susceptible animal from an area without rabies-free status.

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World Organisation for Animal Health (2026) <https://wahis.woah.org/#/in-event/7259/dashboard> Accessed 18 February 2026

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