

Preliminary Outbreak Assessment

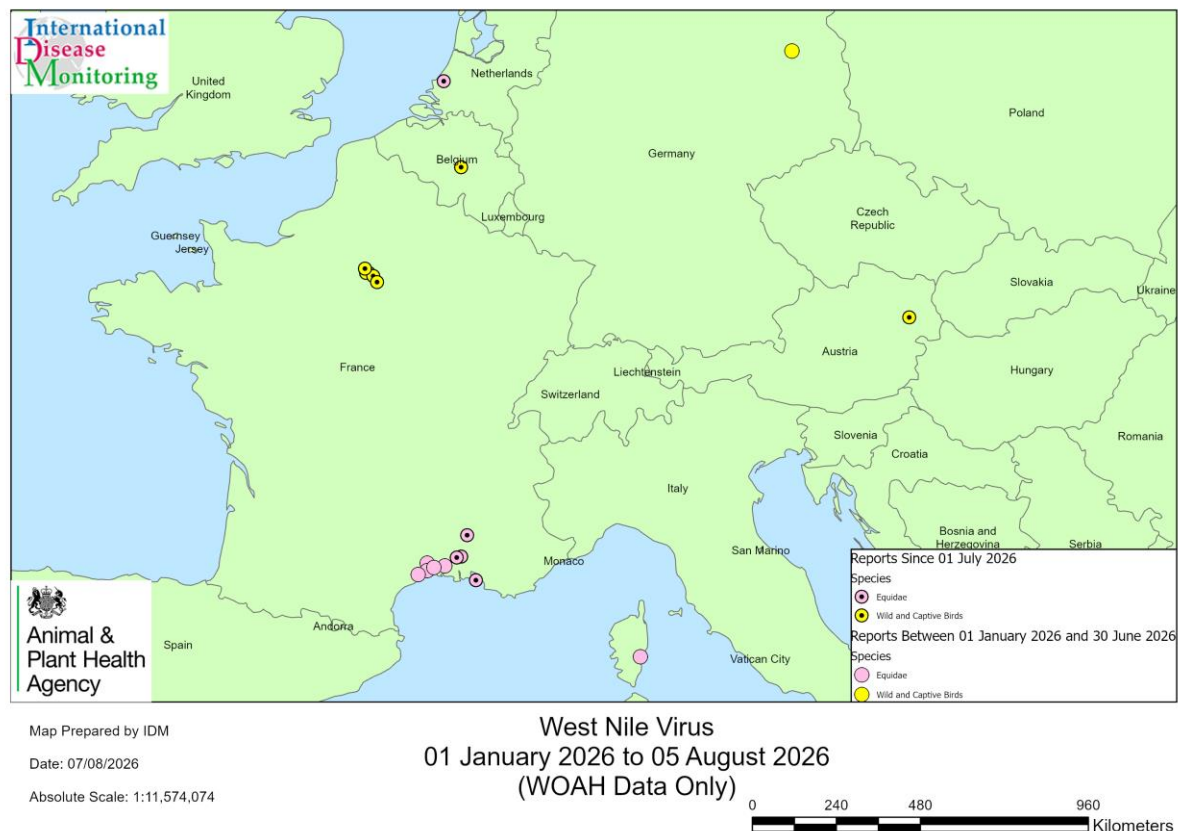
West Nile virus in Europe

8 August 2026

Disease report

West Nile virus (WNV) is a vector-borne Flavivirus disease that causes encephalitis in species affected, predominately birds and equids. The virus circulates between Culex mosquitoes, and birds. Humans and horses can be infected after being bitten by infected mosquitoes and become incidental dead-end hosts, meaning that while they are likely to show clinical signs of the disease, they are unable to transmit the disease themselves. The cycle of transmission occurs annually, usually from mid-June to mid-November ([Sambri et.al, 2013](#)). However, there is rising concern that factors such as climate change are resulting in mosquitoes becoming active earlier in the year and staying active for longer, therefore increasing transmission of vector-borne diseases ([Abbasi, 2025](#)).

According to the UKHSA the spread of WNV is becoming an increasing concern across Europe. Since we [last published](#) a POA on WNV (August 2024) there has been an increase in cases in Europe. In 2025 there were a total of 186 outbreaks among equids and 359 outbreaks among birds reported across Europe. Of these, Italy accounted for 87 equid outbreaks and 330 bird outbreaks. Belgium detected WNV in wild birds for the first time in August 2025, despite no history of locally acquired human cases which indicated continued northward and westward expansion and establishment of the virus ([Sohier, C., et al. 2026](#)). The Netherlands reported active transmission with an outbreak in equids in October 2025, indicating that WNV had become established beyond its traditional areas of circulation in southern Europe ([Beacon](#)). These recent outbreaks also show intensified circulation of lineage 2, with significant detections in corvids and raptors in Germany and Spain also in 2025 ([WOAH, 2026](#)). Due to increasing disease detection, veterinarians are urging for vaccination for horses and sustained monitoring. The following assessment focuses on the 2026 season so far, which has seen the continuation of expansive trends and transmission of both lineage 1 and lineage 2 in Europe.



Situation assessment

In the 2026 season, outbreaks of WNV in animals have been reported in Italy (5 equid cases, 42 avian cases), Spain (3 avian cases), France (15 equid cases, 5 wild avian cases), Greece (2 equid cases), Belgium (6 avian cases), Austria (1 wild avian case), and the Netherlands (1 domestic equid case) ([DAERA](#), [WAHIS](#), [BHVSI-SA reports](#)). All available detail on these can be found below. Although outside of the scope of this assessment, human cases for 2026 have been confirmed in Germany (1), Spain (7), Greece (32), Italy (94), North Macedonia (6, first outbreak in the country), Romania (5) ([BHVSI-SA reports](#)).

Italy

In Italy, 4 wild bird outbreaks between 31 March and 4 May 2026 involved three hooded crows (*Corvus cornix*) in Oristano (province of Sardinia) and a golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) in Cuneo (comune of Piedmont). Infection was consistent with endemic mosquito-bird transmission cycles already established in Italy ([EFSA, 2026](#)). Local officials have initiated vector control measures, including mosquito disinfection, following the detection of the virus in local mosquito, bird, and horse populations in line with a One Health approach ([Wang, 2026](#)).

Spain

In Spain, [reports](#) have announced that health authorities have detected the pathogen in wild birds across Huelva and Lleida. According to [Beacon](#), the two Andalusian cases were detected in Iberian imperial eagle (*Aquila adalberti*) chicks found dead with neurological symptoms and WNV lineage 1 was identified. The Catalan case was detected in a juvenile northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) with compatible clinical symptoms, identified as WNV lineage 2 ([MAPA, 2026](#)). Detections were enabled by Spain's National WNV Surveillance Program in animals, which monitors equids, birds, and mosquitoes and functions as an early warning system for public health authorities.

The Ministry of Health and the Central Veterinary Laboratory have activated early warning systems in the affected regions to manage mosquito populations and limit transmission. Regional health officials have intensified surveillance across 11 Andalusian municipalities to monitor mosquitoes, birds, and horses for virus circulation. The [current alert](#) requires local authorities to implement increased preventive measures and public health communication for at least four weeks and urges locals to prevent stagnating water such as by frequently refreshing water troughs in farms.

France

In France, four outbreaks of West Nile fever in equids were reported to WAHIS in July 2026. Three outbreaks occurred in southern France, with two in Bouches-du-Rhône and one in Vaucluse, involving a total of three affected horses. A fourth equine outbreak was reported in Tarascon (Bouches-du-Rhône). The outbreaks had onset dates between 4 and 17 July 2026 and were identified in domestic equine holdings.

Five outbreaks in wild birds were also reported in the Île-de-France region involving six carrion crows (*Corvus corone*). Cases were reported in Paris (two outbreaks), Saint-Maur-des-Fossés (Val-de-Marne), Brie-Comte-Robert (Seine-et-Marne), and Asnières-sur-Seine (Hauts-de-Seine). In each case, the birds were found showing clinical signs, taken to wildlife rescue centres and died within 24 hours. Infection was confirmed by PCR testing undertaken as part of a research project.

These detections demonstrate continued circulation of WNV in both equine and wild bird populations in France during the 2026 transmission season. Public health and animal health authorities continue to monitor virus activity through surveillance of horses, wild birds and mosquito vectors.

Belgium

In Belgium, WNV was detected in multiple wild bird species during 2026, including a magpie (*Pica pica*), three carrion crows (*Corvus corone*), one Eurasian jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*), and a Eurasian buzzard (*Buteo buteo*). The detections indicate

continued circulation of WNV in wild bird populations following the first detections reported in Belgium in 2025 ([WOAH](#)).

The Netherlands

The Netherlands reported the first autochthonous equine case of the year in a small domestic ranch with two horses to [WAHIS](#) in August 2026. This follows the report of an equine case in October 2025 and provides further evidence of continued WNV circulation in the country. The case was notified in early August 2026 and subsequently confirmed by ELISA testing on 8 August.

Austria

In 2026 there has been [one report to WAHIS](#) of WNV in Austria, on 26 July. The affected animal was a wild common kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) in the region of Mödling (Lower Austria) which displayed clinical signs of the disease. The diagnosis was confirmed on 31 July via PCR. Measures for the control of vectors, wildlife reservoirs, livestock movement control and traceability measures have all been applied at domestic level.

Greece

In July 2026 Greece had 2 new equid cases of WNV ([BHVSI-SA reports](#)).

Impact for Great Britain

To date, there have been no known locally acquired cases of WNV in humans or animals in the UK. Fragments of WNV genetic material were detected in at least two mosquitoes collected in England in 2023 through the Vector-Borne RADAR project. These represented the first detection of WNV genetic material in UK mosquitoes. However, no further detections have been reported since.

The continued circulation of WNV across southern and western Europe, including recent detections in Belgium and the Netherlands, demonstrates the ongoing geographic expansion of the virus and highlights the suitability of environmental conditions for WNV transmission in parts of north-west Europe. Migratory wild birds remain the most likely route for introduction of WNV into Great Britain. These could include migratory passerines flying north into Great Britain from southern Europe including Spain, France and Belgium in Spring. Also, migratory raptors, thrushes and other passerines flying west into Great Britain from the Baltic and Scandinavia through Poland, northern Germany and the Netherlands in the Autumn. With higher temperatures predicted in the future, mosquito prevalence may increase in the Spring

and Autumn increasing the likelihood of autochthonous transmission from viraemic wild birds.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and APHA continue to monitor the risk posed by WNV through vector, wildlife, and disease surveillance programmes. While suitable mosquito vectors are present and abundant in the UK, there is currently no evidence of sustained WNV circulation in British mosquito populations.

Having considered all the relevant incursion pathways, the risk of WNV in Great Britain is currently assessed at “negligible”. However, the increasing incidence and geographic spread of the virus in Europe emphasise the importance of continued surveillance and early detection activities.

UKHSA advises that the greatest risk of exposure to WNV for UK residents remains travel to countries where the virus is circulating.

Conclusion

The risk of autochthonous WNV transmission to horses in the UK because of the recurrence of WNV in birds and horses in Europe is currently (August 2026) considered to be **negligible to very low**. However, there is uncertainty around the ongoing WNV situation in both countries, and the sensitivity of wild bird surveillance across Europe, and this risk may increase as autumn migration approaches.

Since the start of the 2026 transmission season, WNV has been reported in animals in at least eight European countries, with a total of 92 reported cases involving 40 equids and 57 birds. Continued detections in southern Europe, together with ongoing reports from Belgium and the Netherlands, indicate sustained circulation of WNV in north-west Europe and demonstrate the continued geographic spread of the virus within Europe. Both WNV lineage 1 and lineage 2 have been identified during the current season, demonstrating the continued co-circulation of multiple viral lineages.

While there is currently no evidence of WNV transmission in Great Britain, and the increasing prevalence and expanding geographic distribution of the virus in Europe reinforce the need for continued surveillance of wild birds, and susceptible animal populations. Moreover, given the favourable weather conditions for WNV transmission in Europe, ECDC and EFSA predict further outbreaks in equids and birds to be reported in the coming months. In previous years, transmission has typically peaked in August and September ([EFSA, 2026](#)). APHA and UKHSA will continue to monitor the situation and assess any implications for animal and public health in Great Britain.

We will continue to monitor the situation.

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