

UK Says Lab Likely Foot-And-Mouth Source

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[Lindsay Toler, AP Writer](#)

Britain's health and safety agency said Tuesday there was a strong probability that a foot-and-mouth outbreak in southern England originated at a vaccine lab and was spread by human movement.

The outbreak was discovered on a farm just four miles from the Pirbright vaccine laboratory, which is shared by the government's Institute for Animal Health, or IAH, and a private pharmaceutical company, Merial Animal Health, the British arm of Duluth, Ga.-based Merial Ltd.

There is a "real possibility" the disease was spread by human movement, and the possibility it was transmitted by air or floodwaters was "negligible," the government's Health and Safety Executive said in the report.

Environment Secretary Hilary Benn said the report brought efforts to stop the disease "a bit further forward." He said the possibility that the strain had been released by human movement would be urgently investigated, and that footpaths in the protection zone covering two infected farms would be closed immediately.

The highly contagious disease can be carried by wind and on the vehicles and clothes of people who come into contact with infected animals.

A group of cows at a second farm was confirmed to have the disease Tuesday. Cranes piled cattle carcasses onto trucks and authorities slightly expanded the protection zone around a second farm.

Both farms, about 30 miles southwest of London, were within the initial two-mile radius protection zone set up Friday, Benn said.

National Farmers' Union President Peter Kendall said the findings would only "add to the frustration and anger" of farmers.

"I have spoken to many farmers over the last few days who are absolutely



British police officers look at a map of Surrey outside a farm in Normandy, England, Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2007. Tests confirmed a second outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease at the farm southwest of London, Britain's Environment Secretary Hilary Benn said Tuesday, raising fears that the highly contagious virus could devastate herds across southern England. The second batch of cows, tested late Monday, were within the initial 3-kilometer (2-mile) radius protection zone set up Friday around the farm where a first group of infected cattle was found. (AP Photo/Lefteris Pitarakis)

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horrified that the source of this outbreak could be from Pirbright," he said.

Merial said it was assessing the report and would comment on it as soon as possible. The company had previously said it found no evidence of a breach in biosecurity.

News of a second confirmed outbreak fed fears of a repeat of scenes in 2001, when 7 million animals were killed and incinerated on pyres, devastating agriculture and rural tourism in Britain.

"We were starting to think this virus had been contained and maybe we were going to be getting back to normality in a few weeks," Laurence Matthews, who owns the farm where the second infected herd grazed, told British Broadcasting Corp. radio Tuesday.

"Now this has set us back again and most farmers — and I've been speaking to a few — are very, very scared," he said, adding that the infected cows belonged to a fellow farmer who used his land.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown said a second report was expected as early as Wednesday.

"The work goes on to isolate, to contain, control and eradicate the disease," Brown said after the initial report was published.

The health and safety agency said Merial should not immediately resume production, despite a pending government order for 300,000 doses of a strain-specific foot-and-mouth vaccine.

"Our assessment is that there is no reason to prevent the Institute for Animal Health from operating providing that all the usual biosecurity protocols are followed rigorously. In relation to Merial, we advise that further work be done before any operations involving live pathogens are restarted," the health and safety agency's chief executive Geoffrey Podger said.

The disease strain was used in both labs. Merial produced about 10,000 litres of vaccine between July 14 and 25, while IAH conducted a series of small-scale experiments using fewer than 10 milliliters in each case, the report said.

The report found no evidence of any incidents such as laboratory spillages or working practices that could have led to a release of the strain.

Roger Pride, who runs the farm near Godalming, southern England, where the first outbreak was confirmed, said Tuesday his staff realized there was a problem when they spotted the cattle were "off color and drooling."

"For a moment, we couldn't believe it," he said. "It felt as if our whole world was turned upside-down."

The containment process at the second farm seemed slow and laborious, as tractors, glimpsed from behind a thick row of trees, haphazardly piled carcasses. Once the pile was complete, a black crane grabbed the carcasses, one or two at a time, and slid them gently, but quickly, into a truck that would haul them off the premises

Britain's Chief Veterinary Officer Debby Reynolds has said the strain found in the first herd matched samples taken during Britain's 1967 outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. The strain had not been seen in animals for a long time — but was used to produce vaccines, she said.

Foot-and-mouth disease affects cloven-hoofed animals, including cows, sheep, pigs and goats, but does not typically affect humans.



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The first herd of around 120 cows from a farm in Normandy, outside Guildford, was slaughtered Saturday after the virus was identified and confirmed in two animals, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said. It said a total of 199 cows have been culled.

Britain has banned the export of livestock, meat and milk — a decision endorsed by the European Commission.

Associated Press reporters David Stringer and D'Arcy Doran in London contributed to this report.

On the Net:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk>

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