

Chief Veterinary Officers unite to raise awareness of the risk of African swine fever to UK pigs

Robert Huey Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) Northern Ireland, Sheila Voas CVO Scotland, Christianne Glossop CVO Wales and Christine Middlemiss CVO UK, all endorse the following article raising awareness of the increasing risk of an incursion of African swine fever (ASF) to pigs in the UK.

Vets play a key role in keeping Northern Ireland free of exotic notifiable diseases, which is crucial not only for animal health and welfare reasons, but also to prevent devastating impacts on farm businesses and trade.

Robert Huey CVO Northern Ireland said: “ASF presents an important and increasing risk to pigs in the UK. In an outbreak, heightened disease control measures and a potential ban on pork exports could have a financial impact on the pig industry.

“We must all play our part in raising awareness with all pig owners of this significant risk, promoting good biosecurity, and ensuring early detection and effective control, should an incursion be detected.”

ASF was first confirmed in EU Member States in 2014. Since then, the disease has been spreading in wild boar in parts of eastern and central Europe with outbreaks also occurring in domestic pigs, especially in pigs in small herds. Many pigs have died from the disease, and many thousands more have been culled to try to control its spread. The outbreak has been particularly bad in Romania where there have been over 1,000 outbreaks in domestic pigs. There is no effective vaccine available for control. Fortunately this virus does not infect humans and there is no risk to public health.

In mid-September 2018, ASF was detected in Belgium for the first time in wild boar found dead in the Luxembourg region, near the border with France. This is a very significant development in the westward spread of ASF in EU Member States. It illustrates how this disease can move large geographic distances, most likely by people moving infected meat or meat products or objects, materials or equipment contaminated with the virus from ASF-infected areas into Belgium.

Since then further cases of ASF have been found in wild boar in this area of Belgium. As a consequence, Belgian pig farmers have lost much of their international market and a cull of all the domestic pigs kept in the restricted zone has taken place.

Further afield, ASF has been spreading in China since it was first reported in early August 2018. Updates on this disease in different regions can be found [here](#) on the GOV.UK website:

The spread of ASF into Western Europe and persistence of the disease in other regions of the continent emphasise how vital it is for vets and pig keepers in the UK to take action to reduce the risk of this deadly disease entering the UK, and to play their role in safeguarding the health of the pig population. The messages below are important, regardless of whether pigs are kept as pets, in small-scale herds, or on commercial farms.

What you can do to keep pigs free of this virus infection

The biggest risk of ASF entering the UK's pig population is from pigs eating infected pork or pork products derived from infected pigs or wild boar. The ASF virus can survive for months to years in smoked, dried, cured and frozen meat. Meat products brought into the UK from affected countries as personal imports pose the biggest risk. Commercial trade of such

products is not permitted from the ASF-restricted areas. With this in mind it's vital that pig farmers and keepers, including those who keep pet pigs, are made aware of their legal obligation to not feed pigs catering, kitchen or domestic waste.

ASF virus survives at high levels in the meat, blood and carcasses of infected pigs and wild boar and is also in their droppings and manure. The virus can therefore also be spread on vehicles, equipment, clothing and boots contaminated from infected pigs or wild boar. As a result anyone returning to the UK after visiting ASF-affected areas in Europe could unknowingly bring back infection. Whether they are visiting friends or family, travelling on business or returning from a holiday or a hunting trip they pose a risk. If these people also happen to keep pigs, or work on pig farms, they could pass that contamination on to the pigs and introduce disease, but there are some straightforward actions that will stop this happening. The following are the key messages for you to share:

1. Feed pigs only with legally permitted foods

- Never allow pigs to eat meat or meat products – **this is ILLEGAL**
- Never feed pigs catering or domestic kitchen waste – **this is ILLEGAL**
- Don't let anyone eat or bring meat or meat products, or waste food, near pigs to avoid accidental access
- Dispose of waste food so that pigs cannot access it
- Provide a balanced diet using a specially formulated pig feed
- Fruit and vegetables can be fed but must not have entered a kitchen or contacted other food.

2. Practise good biosecurity

- Use dedicated protective outer clothing and boots for people coming into contact with your pigs, these should not be used off your premises
- Limit visitors to pigs to a minimum and avoid visits from people just returned from abroad
- Prevent vehicles or equipment from coming on to premises with pigs unless cleaned and disinfected first
- If you have a footpath/bridleway on your land or beside it and near your pigs, display "Do not feed the pigs" signs. These are available to download on the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (ADHB) Pork website at:
<https://pork.ahdb.org.uk/health-welfare/health/emerging-diseases/african-swine-fever/>.

An ASF poster is also available for pig keepers summarising this information which you may wish to pass on: <http://apha.defra.gov.uk/documents/surveillance/diseases/african-swine-fever-poster.pdf> and the EU has produced an animated video to underline key messages: <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/press/news/180711>

More detailed advice, including guidance on biosecurity, is also available at

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/african-swine-fever>

Anything you can do to promote these messages amongst your colleagues and to your pig-keeping clients is valuable in reducing the risk of introduction of ASF to the UK, whether their pigs are pets, or in small-scale or commercial herds. In addition, if you are visiting clients who have pigs, take the opportunity to discuss and demonstrate best biosecurity practices to them.

Images of the clinical signs and pathology of ASF are also available as a reminder of what it looks like at: <http://apha.defra.gov.uk/documents/surveillance/diseases/african-swine-fever-images.pdf>

What to do if you suspect you have identified ASF in pigs

If you suspect you have identified ASF, report it to your local Divisional Veterinary Office via the DAERA helpline on 0300 200 7852 (out of office hours on 028 9052 5596) or contact your local DAERA Direct Office on 0300 200 7840 or visit a DAERA Regional Office: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/daera-direct-regional-offices.

Guidance on how to spot and report the disease is available at www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/african-swine-fever

