

# Detailed guide: Honey bees: protecting them from pests and diseases

*Updated:* Minor changes to the guidance under the Asian hornet heading.

There are a number of notifiable pests and diseases in the UK which may affect your bees. If you suspect they are present within your colonies you must tell the National Bee Unit (NBU) or your local [bee inspector](#) immediately. Failure to do so is an offence.

You can find advice on beekeeping on [BeeBase](#).

## **Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*)**

*Vespa velutina*, known as the Asian hornet or yellow legged hornet, is a predator of honey bees.

### **How to spot an Asian hornet**

Asian hornets:

- have a dark brown or black velvety body
- have a yellow or orange band on fourth segment of abdomen
- have yellow tipped legs
- are smaller than the native European hornet
- are not active at night

Guidance on how to identify an Asian hornet and report any suspected sightings is available on the [Non-Native Species Secretariat website](#).

## **American foulbrood**

American foulbrood (AFB) is a notifiable disease. If you suspect it is present within your colonies you must tell the [National Bee Unit](#) immediately.

Signs of American foulbrood include:

- wax cappings becoming sunken and perforated
- cappings becoming moist or greasy looking and changing colour
- when looking at the bottom of cells, AFB scales, which resemble a proboscis tongue, can be seen in comb cells
- an unpleasant smell
- when remains are drawn out, the mucus may be ropey

If you suspect your colony has American foulbrood you must:

- contact the NBU office or your local bee inspector immediately

- close the hive
- disinfect beekeeping equipment
- not remove any colonies, equipment or honey from the site until the disease, if confirmed, has been controlled

Find out [more about how American foulbrood is spread and controlled](#).

## European foulbrood

European foulbrood is a notifiable disease. If you suspect it is present within your colonies you must tell the [National Bee Unit](#) immediately.

Signs of European foulbrood include:

- dead larva collapse, turning yellowish-brown
- brood pattern appearing patchy and erratic
- an unpleasant sour smell

If you suspect your colony has European foulbrood you must:

- contact the NBU office or your local bee inspector immediately
- close the hive
- disinfect beekeeping equipment before examining other colonies
- not remove any colonies, equipment or honey from the site until the disease, if confirmed, has been controlled

Find out [more about how European foulbrood is spread and controlled](#).

## Small hive beetle

Small hive beetle is a notifiable pest. If you suspect it is present within your apiary you must tell the [National Bee Unit](#) immediately.

### How to spot a small hive beetle

Small hive beetles:

- are oval in shape, 5 to 7 mm long and 3 to 4.5 mm wide
- are reddish brown in colour but change to dark brown or black as they mature
- have distinctive club shaped antennae
- produce larvae with characteristic rows of spines on the back and 3 pairs of legs near the head

Signs of small hive beetle in a colony include:

- small black beetles running around the comb or hiding in small dark crevices of the hive
- larvae burrowing through the brood combs, consuming brood and stores

- larvae clumping together in corners of frames or combs cells
- clusters of small 'rice grain' eggs in cracks and crevices of the hive
- honey fermenting and dripping out of cells
- combs becoming slimy or smelling of rotten oranges

If you suspect small hive beetle is present within your colonies you must:

- contact the NBU office or your local bee inspector immediately
- not remove any colonies, equipment or honey from the site until approved to do so by the NBU

The small hive beetle is not thought to be present in the UK. Import regulations are the main defence against its introduction.

Find out more about the [small hive beetle, its life cycle and control methods](#).

## **Tropilaelaps mite**

Tropilaelaps mite is a notifiable pest. If you suspect it is present within your colonies you must tell the [National Bee Unit](#) immediately.

### **How to spot a Tropilaelaps mite**

Tropilaelaps mites:

- hide in brood cells rather than on adult bees
- have elongated bodies about 1mm long and 0.5mm wide
- are reddish brown

Signs of Tropilaelaps mite in a colony include:

- irregular or poor brood patterns
- surviving adult bees having a shorter lifespan
- adult bees with shrunken or deformed wings and abdomens

If you suspect the Tropilaelaps mite is present within your colonies you must:

- contact the NBU office or your local bee inspector immediately
- not remove any colonies, equipment or honey from the site until approved to do so by the NBU

Tropilaelaps mite are not currently thought to be present in the UK. Import regulations are the main defence against its introduction.

Find out more about [Tropilaelaps mite, their life cycle and control methods](#).

## **Importing or exporting bees**

Import regulations are the main defence against the introduction of many pests and diseases.

If you want to import bees into the UK, you must follow animal health requirements in line with national and EU law.

If you want to export bees to any country outside the UK you must get a health certificate from your bee inspector.

Read the [BeeBase guidance on importing and exporting bees](#).

## **Register your beekeeping details**

If you're a beekeeper, you should register your details online at [BeeBase](#).

Keeping your records up to date helps the NBU monitor and control pests and diseases and provide relevant information, like local disease alerts.

## **Contact**

### **Bee health policy helpline**

Email: [beehealthinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:beehealthinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

Telephone: 020 8026 2524 or 020 8026 3576

### **Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme helpline**

Telephone: 0800 321 600