

Local pig samples test positive for African Swine Fever virus

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (January 16) announced that samples taken from a licensed pig farm in Yuen Long had tested positive for the African Swine Fever (ASF) virus.

An AFCD spokesman said, "Thirty-five pig samples were taken from a licensed pig farm in Pak Sha, Yuen Long, yesterday (January 15). Upon testing by AFCD staff, at least eight samples were found positive for the ASF virus. The AFCD has immediately suspended transportation of any pigs from the farm concerned until further notice according to the contingency plan on ASF. The AFCD is arranging culling of pigs, for the sake of prudence."

He further said, "Positive cases should be seriously and promptly handled, as the effect of ASF is very lethal to pigs. If the spread is not contained, a large number of pigs will die, hence seriously impacting pig farmers and the pig rearing industry. AFCD staff immediately notified all local pig farmers of this incident and reminded them to alert the AFCD immediately if any abnormal health conditions are observed in pigs. In addition, the AFCD will arrange for staff to inspect the three pig farms within three kilometres of the index farm and collect pig samples for ASF testing. For the sake of prudence, the AFCD has suspended the movement of pigs on those pig farms until further notice. No reports of abnormalities from pig farms outside the three-kilometre zone have been received so far. AFCD staff are continuing close surveillance to detect pigs with abnormalities and to determine if a farm is infected as early as possible. Surveillance of the activities of nearby wild pigs of the index farm will also be stepped up. Furthermore, the AFCD is maintaining close contact with pig farmers via text message groups, keeping them informed of the latest situation of ASF and ways to prevent the infection of pigs."

The spokesman stressed that ASF is not a zoonotic disease and will not infect humans; hence, it does not pose any human health and food safety risk. Regardless of whether the pigs are infected with ASF, pork cooked thoroughly is safe for consumption. Members of the public do not need to be concerned. The AFCD has held a seminar for pig farmers on specific preventive measures and biosecurity advice against ASF, with a view to enhancing vigilance of the industry in the prevention of ASF. Meanwhile, in order to strengthen the knowledge of local pig farmers of the clinical signs of ASF for early detection and reporting of abnormalities in pigs, the AFCD has launched the Guidelines for Reporting Cases of African Swine Fever to assist pig farmers in identifying suspected cases for early reporting and appropriate follow-up.

The present case does not affect the operation of local slaughterhouses or the overall supply of live pigs. Since June 2019, a daily clearance arrangement, whereby live pigs will be slaughtered within 24 hours upon admittance, has been imposed in Sheung Shui and Tsuen Wan slaughterhouses.

Under the arrangement, lairages in different areas of the slaughterhouses are cleared and undergo thorough cleaning and disinfection every day to further enhance biosecurity and minimise the risk of infection among pigs in the slaughterhouses.

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the AFCD will continue to stringently conduct cleaning and disinfection of Mainland live pig transportation vehicles and their counterparts for local pigs at slaughterhouses to minimise the risk of cross-infection of ASF. Mainland live pig vehicles and local ones should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected every time they leave the Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse (SSSH), and the respective designated positions for their cleaning and disinfection are separated. Manpower and equipment of the SSSH have been strengthened immediately for cleaning and disinfection of the vehicles. In light of these stepped-up measures, the slaughterhouses need not be closed and other pigs need not be culled.

As culling operation takes time, the AFCD will release updated operation information every day later on the departmental webpage, www.afcd.gov.hk, for the public.