

Local pig samples test positive for ASF virus

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) yesterday (January 14) announced that samples taken from a licensed pig farm in Yuen Long had tested positive for the African Swine Fever (ASF) virus. The present ASF case has been discovered by the AFCD upon a local pig farmer's early report and AFCD's assistance to the pig farmer in following up on a suspected case.

Located within the 3-kilometre monitoring zone of a Yuen Long pig farm where ASF was previously detected, the index pig farm is near pig farms where pig samples tested positive for the ASF virus in the previous month and last Wednesday. This pig farm submitted pig samples on January 13 which were confirmed yesterday by the AFCD as infected. With a preliminary investigation, it is believed that the pigs of the index farm were infected with the ASF virus earlier and has now succumbed to the disease as the incubation period can last up to 19 days.

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 all pigs on the farm, for the sake of prudence. The culling operation will commence this week.

The AFCD has implemented an emergency measure on handling dead pigs on local pig farms on the advice of an international veterinary expert since January 3. All farms are required to collect and submit to the AFCD nasal swab samples from pig carcasses for ASF virus testing. Disposal of carcasses can only be arranged by the farms upon confirmation of a negative result.

An AFCD spokesman said, "Since the incubation period of the ASF virus can last up to 19 days, other pig farms located within the 3-kilometre monitoring zone still present a higher risk of outbreaks. The AFCD will continue to closely monitor the situation of the pig farms and offer recommendations to enhance their biosecurity measures."

The spokesman further said, "The AFCD has implemented a series of measures. (1) The AFCD collaborated with the international veterinary expert to provide guidelines on biosecurity measures for local pig farms earlier. (2) On January 12, the AFCD has further explained and provided training to the industry to facilitate prompt implementation and strict observation of the biosecurity measures specific to their pig farms, thereby effectively containing the spread of ASF on local pig farms on different levels. (3) In order to strengthen the knowledge of local pig farmers of the clinical signs of ASF for early detection and reporting of abnormality of 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 to take appropriate follow-up. (4) AFCD staff have been distributed sampling materials and protective clothing to all local pig farms. (5) AFCD staff keep

close communication with pig farmers to update them on the latest situation of ASF via SMS groups."

The spokesman also said that 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 and 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 abnormal health condition is observed in pigs.

The AFCD has sent staff to inspect the eight pig farms within 3 kilometres of the index farm and collect pig samples for ASF virus testing. For the sake of prudence, the AFCD has temporarily suspended movements of pigs on those pig farms until further notice. AFCD staff are conducting visits in phases to all local licensed pig farms to ensure good biosecurity measures have been properly implemented; and continued close surveillance to detect pigs with abnormalities and if a farm is infected as early as possible. Surveillance of wild pig activities in the vicinity of the index farm has also been stepped up.

The spokesman stressed that ASF is not a zoonotic disease and will not infect humans, hence does not present 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 present case does not affect the operation of local slaughterhouses nor 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 will be cleared out and undergo thorough cleaning and disinfection every day to further enhance the 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 web page, www.afcd.gov.hk, for the public.