

Local pig samples test positive for ASF virus

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (January 2) announced that samples taken from a pig farm in Yuen Long had tested positive for the African Swine Fever (ASF) virus.

An AFCD spokesman said, "Samples were taken from 13 pigs at a licensed pig farm in San Tin, Yuen Long, yesterday (January 1). Upon testing by AFCD staff, samples from eight pigs 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 all pigs, totalling over 400 on the farm concerned, 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 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. In addition, the AFCD has arranged staff to inspect the eight pig farms within three kilometres of the index farm and collect pig samples for ASF testing. For the sake of prudence, the AFCD has been suspending movements of pigs on those eight 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 conducting visits in phases to all local licensed pig farms to ensure 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 the activities of wild pigs in the vicinity of the index farm has also been stepped up. Besides, 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 does not cause 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 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 prevention of further spread 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 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.

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.