

New UK border campaign warns of threat of African swine fever

A new campaign was launched today (31 July) at the UK's border to help keep the damaging animal disease African swine fever (ASF) out of the country.

The disease, which poses no threat to human health but is fatal for pigs, has already spread widely across Asia – including China and Vietnam – and parts of Central and Eastern Europe. Cases have also been reported throughout Sub Saharan Africa.

This has led to the deaths of over 800,000 pigs and wild boar in Europe and an estimated four million pigs in Asia, causing global pork prices to rise. If the disease was found in this country, it could have a devastating impact on the UK's commercial pig stock of five million pigs, as well as the trade of our pork products.

The main ways that the disease can spread are:

- Tourists or travellers bringing contaminated pork products with them from infected areas. All travellers are strongly advised to avoid bringing any pork products – including preserved meats, ham or pork sandwiches – back to the UK. Bringing in potentially contaminated pork products from affected regions is an offence – it can result in prosecution and a large fine.
- Pig keepers and members of the public feeding catering waste, kitchen scraps or pork products to their animals. It is illegal to do so.
- Travellers returning from ASF-affected areas coming into contact with domestic pigs, commercial holdings or smallholdings. The disease can spread via contaminated clothing, footwear or equipment, as well as pork products.
- Contaminated vehicles and equipment being taken onto commercial pig premises or workers wearing contaminated clothing or boots when entering pig premises.

Today's new campaign aims to safeguard the UK's pork and pig industries by targeting anyone who has the potential to introduce African swine fever to the UK. It includes a new poster campaign, which will be introduced to UK airports and ports throughout the summer, to raise awareness of the disease and the risks of bringing back contaminated products.

UK Border officials enforce controls at the border on illegal meat by searching freight, passengers and luggage and will seize and destroy illegally imported meat products.

Lord Gardiner, Minister for Biosecurity, said:

While there has never been an outbreak of African swine fever in the UK, we are not complacent and already have robust measures in

place to protect against animal disease outbreaks.

This poster campaign at UK airports and ports adds to the strict control measures we have put in place to ensure that no live pigs, wild boar or pork products from affected areas reach the UK.

It is essential all tourists and holidaymakers do not bring to the UK any pork products to protect the UK's high biosecurity.

The Chief Veterinary Officers from the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, said:

Keeping African swine fever out of the UK is one of our top priorities. As we have seen around the world, its impact on pig farmers and the wider pork industry has been devastating.

The virus survives incredibly well in pork meat and can survive for months in smoked, dried and cured meats and likely years in frozen meat.

That is why it is crucial that anyone travelling from affected regions takes this advice seriously in order to ensure that there is no spread of the disease to animals in the UK.

Dr Zoë Davies, Chief Executive of the National Pig Association, said:

The NPA is delighted that Defra and UK Border Force are launching this campaign.

We have always stressed that the biggest threat to our pig herd is from products coming in from affected countries, so this is an important step to help keep ASF from entering our country.

The Government has estimated that a 'reasonable worst-case scenario' ASF outbreak could cost the country £90 million. We believe the figure would be much higher and that is why we need to mobilise every available resource and effort to help prevent such a catastrophe.