



# Livestock Notifiable Disease

## Factsheets

### African Swine Fever

**If you suspect signs of any notifiable disease, you must immediately notify a Defra Divisional Veterinary Manager.**

#### Definition

African swine fever (ASF) is a highly contagious viral disease of pigs. Some strains of the virus cause severe disease and high mortality. Ornithodoros ticks, where present, can act as vectors of the ASF virus. ASF is clinically indistinguishable from Classical Swine Fever (CSF)

#### History and extent of the disease

African swine fever was first recorded in Kenya in 1921 and is present in most sub-Saharan African countries. It spread to southern Europe in 1957 but has persisted only in Sardinia (Italy). There have been no reported outbreaks of ASF in other European countries since the outbreak in 1999 in Portugal. Unlike Classical Swine Fever (CSF), this disease has never been recorded in the United Kingdom.

#### Clinical symptoms

The symptoms of ASF and CSF are very similar and either disease may occur in acute, sub-acute or chronic forms. Laboratory diagnosis is necessary to distinguish ASF from CSF. The essential differences between ASF and CSF are that ASF generally has a longer incubation period, it is possible for ASF to be transmitted by ticks, and the lack of any vaccine to control ASF. The incubation period for the ASF virus is variable but is usually between five and fifteen days. In the acute form pigs develop a high temperature (40.5 °C / 105 °F), become dull and go off their food. Other symptoms seen are variable but will include some or all of the following:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea (sometimes bloody)
- Reddening or darkening of the skin, particularly ears and snout
- Gummed-up eyes
- Laboured breathing and coughing
- Abortion, still births and weak litters
- Weakness and unwillingness to stand

#### Differential diagnosis

- Classical swine fever
- Erysipelas
- Salmonellosis
- Pasteurellosis
- All septicaemic conditions

## How could this disease be introduced and spread?

The main risk of ASF introduction is via infected pigmeat or pigmeat products, for example illegally imported pigmeat or bush meat from infected countries or legally imported meat from areas with undetected infection. The ASF virus can survive for many months in raw unprocessed frozen meats.

The disease could also be introduced through imported infected animals. The movement of infected pigs is a common method of spreading ASF. Apparently healthy pigs may be incubating disease and recovered pigs can excrete the virus for long periods of time.

The virus can survive outside the pig for a long time, so the movement of contaminated vehicles, clothing, footwear and equipment can also spread disease.

The ticks (*Ornithodoros* spp) that may spread the disease in other countries are not present in the UK.

## What steps are taken to prevent this disease reaching Great Britain?

Great Britain operates strict controls over the import of animals and animal products primarily to guard against the introduction of animal diseases. While these methods are generally effective, it is possible that pigmeat infected with ASF virus may accidentally enter the country.

If the ASF virus does enter the country, the risk of it infecting pigs has been reduced by the ban on swill feeding introduced in May 2001 (now included in the Animal By-Products Regulations 2003). Should a pig become infected the spread of the disease would be limited by the controls contained in the Pigs (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 2003 (PRIMO). Further information on pigs identification and tracing can be found on our identification and tracing pages.

PRIMO also requires identification and movement recording control measures which provide invaluable aids in tracing contacts should a pig disease outbreak occur.

## What can you do to guard your herd against this disease?

Watch your herd carefully for signs of disease. Wherever possible, purchase stock from known sources. Restrict the movement of persons, vehicles and equipment to and from your premises. When such movements are necessary disinfection facilities should be available and used. Provide a loading/unloading bay, which is solely for the use of incoming and outgoing stock. Follow the Defra Biosecurity guidance which is available.

## What should you do if you suspect swine fever?

If you are the owner, person in charge or a veterinary surgeon attending pigs you must report your suspicions to the Defra Divisional Veterinary Manager at your local Animal Health Divisional Office. You must not move any pig, carcass or anything else (e.g. feed or waste) suspected of being infected with swine fever until a Defra veterinary inspector has visited and decided whether it is necessary to impose restrictions. If the veterinary inspector suspects the disease, movement restrictions will be enforced and material from the suspect animals will be sent for laboratory diagnosis to establish whether the condition is African or Classical swine fever, or neither. Samples are examined for both these diseases.

## Great Britain Legislation

The African Swine Fever (England) Order 2003 comes into force on 5 December 2003. It enacts the provisions of EU Council Directive 2002/60/EC of 27 June 2002, for the control of African swine fever. Similar legislation will apply in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The new Order revokes and replaces existing GB legislation for the control of ASF – the African Swine Fever Order 1980. The provisions of the Order are explained in the letter to industry.

## Compensation

The African Swine Fever (Compensation) Order 1980 says that where an animal was infected with African swine fever the compensation shall be half the value of the animal immediately before it became infected, and in every other case the compensation shall be the value of the animal immediately before it was slaughtered.

## Pictures of the disease



*Ornithodoros talaje*.  
Female, dorsal view



Peracute African Swine Fever. In the peracute form of the disease, death may occur before any clinical signs appear.



Dead pig with general reddening of the skin



Hyperaemia of the back and tail



Enlarged spleen (top) and normal spleen (bottom)



Swelling and haemorrhagia of the intestine

Photo credits: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)

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