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trading standards law explained

African swine fever

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England

African swine fever (ASF) is a highly contagious viral disease of pigs and wild boar. In its acute form, the disease generally results in extremely high morbidity and mortality.

It causes severe damage to blood vessels and multiple organs, leading to widespread haemorrhages, fever, and sudden death. The virus is extremely hardy and can survive for extended periods in pork products, the environment, and contaminated equipment. ASF is caused by a different virus from classical swine fever (CSF), but the diseases can appear similar.

African swine fever is a notifiable disease. If you suspect ASF, you must tell the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) immediately by telephoning 0300 020 0301. Failure to do so is an offence.

What is the possible impact of the disease?

ASF, if left unchecked, could cause severe economic losses to the industry, with significant impacts on rural communities. An outbreak of disease would result in strict movement restrictions and immediate bans on the export of live pigs and pig products. From a welfare perspective, severe forms of the disease cause considerable animal suffering.

Clinical signs

Affected pigs may show a wide range of clinical signs, reflecting the fact that the virus affects most organs and systems. Examples of clinical signs include:

- Sudden death without previous signs of ill-health
- Fever
- Refusal to feed and loss of appetite
- Dullness and reluctance to move
- Red or dark blotching of the skin, particularly on the ears and snout
- Vomiting or diarrhoea (sometimes bloody)
- Coughing and laboured breathing
- Weakness and unsteady gait (including swaying, circling, or lack of coordination)
- Convulsions
- Abortions or the birth of weak piglets

Mortality in acute outbreaks can reach 90-100%, and all age groups are equally susceptible.

There are several different strains of ASF. Pigs infected with milder strains may show fewer signs but can still spread the virus.

Photos showing the clinical signs and pathology of African swine fever have been published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). **Note:** some of the images are quite graphic; please do not view them if you feel you may be negatively affected.

Sources of transmission

- Feeding pigs with ASF-infected pork meat or products
- Direct contact between healthy pigs and pigs carrying ASF
- Contact with infected blood, faeces, urine or saliva
- Contaminated pens, vehicles, equipment or clothing
- Contact with infected wild boar

The virus is extremely resilient and can survive for months in meat, manure and the environment.

What happens if disease is confirmed?

The premises where disease is confirmed will be referred to as the infected premises. It will be placed under restriction so no animals, carcases, equipment or any other thing can move on or off except under the authority of a licence issued by a veterinary inspector. An approved disinfectant must be used to disinfect footwear, clothing and vehicles before entering or leaving the premises. Restrictions on spreading pig manure and slurry will also apply.
The keeper must keep accurate records to show the number and type of pigs on the premises since

restrictions were imposed, together with the number that:

- Are alive
- Show clinical signs of illness
- Have died
- Have been born

These records must be kept for six months after the restrictions have been lifted.

A protection zone of 3 km and a surveillance zone of 10 km around the infected premises will be put in place. There are specific restrictions for keepers of pigs within these zones.

More information on the disease control strategy for ASF in Great Britain and the contingency plan for exotic notifiable diseases can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Can people catch the disease?

ASF cannot be contracted by humans, so there is no risk associated with contact with infected pigs.

Could it affect the food I eat?

No, ASF does not affect the food we eat and it cannot be contracted by consuming pork products.

What can be done to reduce the risks?

The disease is highly contagious.

Pigs keepers must register their animals and land, including pigs only kept as pets. All pig movements must be correctly reported and recorded. This permits the tracking of pigs and their movements to prevent and control disease. More information on keeping pigs is available on the GOV.UK website.

Good biosecurity is essential. Biosecurity measures should be practised as a matter of routine. Trucks, lorries, marketplaces and loading ramps (in or over which infected animals have travelled) are a disease risk until properly cleansed and disinfected. Roads may also become contaminated, and viruses may be picked up and carried on the wheels of passing vehicles.

The boots, clothing and hands of any person who has been in contact with infected animals can spread the disease.

Pigs must be prevented from eating infectious food or feed. Waste food should be disposed of correctly and in secure bins that pigs and wild animals cannot access. Due to the risk of spreading disease, it is illegal to feed catering or domestic food waste to any pigs. Catering waste includes all food that has been in a domestic or commercial kitchen, even if it contains no meat. More information on feeding pigs can be found on the GOV.UK website.

The risk to the industry from contaminated food and feed products is significant, and there are strict rules on trade and personal imports. More information on trade and personal imports can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Notifiable diseases

For information on diseases that are notifiable (which means there is a legal requirement to report cases and suspected cases to APHA), please see 'Notifiable diseases'.

Disease alerts

Livestock keepers can stay up to date with the latest African swine fever developments via the APHA alert subscription service.

Further information

More guidance on African swine fever can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law, please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

New guidance: March 2026

Key legislation

- Animal Health Act 1981
- Animal Health Act 2002
- Transport of Animals (Cleansing and Disinfection) (England) (No. 3) Order 2003
- Pigs (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 2011
- Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2013
- Diseases of Swine Regulations 2014
- Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (England) Regulations 2018
- African Swine Fever (Import Controls) (England and Scotland) Order 2022

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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