businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Cleansing and disinfection of vehicles

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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

The Transport of Animals (Cleansing and Disinfection) (England) (No. 3) Order 2003 contains requirements regarding the cleansing and disinfection of the means of transport used to carry animals.

The Order uses the term "'means of transport' [which] includes its fittings, its detachable parts and any containers (whether detachable or not) used with it". This guide uses the word 'vehicle' to mean the same thing.

Every vehicle used to carry cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, deer, racing pigeons or poultry* must be cleansed and disinfected before being loaded. Vehicles used to transport horses must be cleansed, but only need to be disinfected where necessary.

[*Poultry means: domestic fowls, turkeys, geese, ducks, guinea-fowls, quails, pigeons, pheasants, partridge and ratites (if reared or kept in captivity for breeding, the production of meat or eggs for consumption, or for restocking supplies of game).]

Vehicles must also, as soon as reasonably practicable, be cleansed and disinfected with an approved

disinfectant after unloading and before being used again, and in any case no later than 24 hours after the journey is completed (except in limited circumstances).

Level of cleansing and disinfection

All cleansing and disinfection of vehicles must be carried out in order to reduce the transmission of disease, in so far as it is reasonably practicable.

To cut down on the level of cleansing and disinfection that is necessary, it is recommended that absorbent bedding materials are used to soak up liquids. Faeces and urine should be contained during transport, and not be permitted to leak. The vehicle's design should prevent leakage.

Method of cleansing

All the inside surfaces of the vehicle in which the animals are transported and all parts of the vehicle to which animals have had access during the journey must be cleansed with clean water, steam or (when appropriate) chemicals until free of dirt.

The process must remove:

- any feeding stuff to which the animals have had access
- bedding
- excreta and other material of animal origin
- mud and other contaminants

Wheels, mudguards and wheel arches must receive particular attention.

Detachable fittings and any other equipment that have become soiled during loading, transport and unloading must also be cleansed.

Disinfection after cleansing

After cleansing has been completed, anything that needs to be disinfected must be. An 'approved disinfectant' must be used.

An approved disinfectant is one that is approved for use for certain specified diseases under the Diseases of Animals Approved Disinfectants (England) Order 2007. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) holds a current list of approved disinfectants and their approved dilution rates and more information on disinfectant approval is available on the GOV.UK website.

Disposal of material after cleansing

All material removed from vehicles after cleansing has been carried out must go through one of the following processes (except where other legislation applies):

- destroyed
- treated to remove the risk of transmission of disease
- disposed of so that animals have no access to it

This includes feeding stuffs to which animals have had access, litter, excreta, other materials of animal

origin and other contaminants removed from the vehicle.

Failure to remove contaminated material can contribute to the spread of diseases such as salmonellosis, leptospirosis, toxoplasmosis (which can lead to stillbirth), tuberculosis, foot-and-mouth disease and cryptosporidiosis.

Vehicle leaving a slaughterhouse or sale premises (markets)

In the following circumstances, a vehicle's driver must, before leaving the premises, give a written declaration to the occupier of the slaughterhouse / market, stating where the cleansing and disinfection shall take place and give the declaration to the market or slaughterhouse operator. The circumstances are when a vehicle:

- has been used to transport stock to a slaughterhouse or sale premises (market) and
- is to leave empty without being cleansed and disinfected (other than as part of a shuttle journey)

A model declaration is available on the GOV.UK website.

Transport of horses

Horses must only be loaded on to a vehicle that has been cleansed and, where necessary, disinfected. It is necessary to disinfect the vehicle, in addition to cleansing, when a vehicle last used to transport horses is to be used to transport cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, deer, racing pigeons or poultry

Exceptions to the Regulations

The following circumstances allow for slightly less stringent cleansing and disinfection:

- journeys made within a single farming enterprise in one ownership
- if you use your vehicle exclusively on a single day, for the carriage of the above animals between the same two points (other than two sales premises), there is no need to cleanse and disinfect between each load; however, it must be cleansed and disinfected before the first journey of the day and after the last
- the transport of animals to livestock shows from the premises of origin and return, as long as the vehicle does not leave the show before the return journey and only the same animals are transported to and from the show
- the unloading of animals solely to be fed, watered or for some other temporary purpose and then reloaded during a journey

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

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: December 2025

Key legislation

- Transport of Animals (Cleansing and Disinfection) (England) (No. 3) Order 2003
- Diseases of Animals (Approved Disinfectants) (England) Order 2007

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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