

African swine fever in Europe

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An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Overview

African swine fever (ASF) is a highly contagious viral disease of pigs and wild boar that was exotic to Europe until recent years¹. The virus first entered Georgia in Eastern Europe in 2007. It then spread across Eastern Europe and first entered the European Union in 2014 where it was detected in Lithuania. Currently, the disease has spread to 8 EU Member States including Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and more recently Bulgaria (September 2018).

African swine fever has never been detected in Ireland.

ASF affects domestic pigs, wild boar, warthogs, and other members of the pig family. It does not affect any other animal species and it does not affect humans.

Transmission

The virus is found in all body fluids and tissues of infected pigs and can be spread directly or indirectly as follows:

- Direct contact with infected pigs or wild boar, faeces or body fluids (including semen)
- Indirect contact via fomites such as equipment, vehicles or people
- Pigs eating infected pig meat or meat products
- Biological vectors - ticks of the species *Ornithodoros* (vector species not present in Ireland)
- Iatrogenic transmission may be possible.

The ASF virus is highly resistant and can survive in meat and pigmeat products such as sausages or salami for several months and has been shown to survive for several years in frozen meat. The illegal feeding of swill or food waste containing pigmeat or pigmeat products to pigs is a significant risk factor for the spread of the disease.

Clinical Signs

ASF is a highly contagious often fatal disease of pigs of all ages which can have a mortality rate approaching 100%.

Chronic forms of ASF are rare and are normally only seen in countries where the disease has become endemic.

Clinical signs of the acute form of ASF can include:

Sudden death	High temperature	Skin haemorrhages and cyanosis
Depression	Inappetance	Recumbence
Difficulty breathing	Vomiting	Diarrhoea
Constipation	Abortion	Stillborn or weak piglets

Treatment

There is no treatment or vaccine currently available for ASF. If the disease is confirmed EU legislation requires strict control measures to be implemented some of which include:

- culling and disposal of pigs on the infected holding
- establishment of control zones surrounding the holding (3km and 10km) with increased animal health control measures and movement restrictions
- cleaning and disinfection of premises, vehicles etc.
- increased levels of surveillance to detect any further spread of the disease.

Prevention

Control measures for the movement of pigs and pig products were introduced through specific EU legislation to curtail the spread of the disease in Eastern Europe. Wild boar density has also been reduced in affected regions in an attempt to prevent further spread of the disease. Increased levels of biosecurity at farm level are essential to stop the spread of ASF to domestic pigs in Eastern Europe. These biosecurity measures are also important for countries that are free of the disease, including Ireland.

Some of these preventative biosecurity measures include:

- Visitors or personnel coming from ASF affected regions of Europe should not to bring any pork or pork products back Ireland e.g. sausages, salami.
- Visitors or staff on pig farms that have returned from affected countries should observe a pig-free period of at least 72 hours before entering a pig farm if they have had contact with other pigs or wild boar
- Only essential visitors should be allowed onto a pig farm and they should wear clean or disposable overalls and footwear and wash their hands (or shower if possible)
- All vehicles and equipment should be cleaned and disinfected before being brought on to a pig farm
- Pigs and any porcine reproductive material (e.g. semen) should be sourced from reliable sources of known health status and all live pigs should be quarantined on arrival to the farm for a minimum of 30 days
- **Never** allow food waste (swill) to be fed to pigs

The feeding of any food waste of animal origin or food waste which has been in contact with products of animal origin, whether raw or cooked, is illegal in Ireland

Regular updates and factsheets for both vets and farmers regarding ASF are available in the [African swine fever](#) section of the DAFM website at www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/diseasecontrol/. A [multilingual poster for pig farmers](#) and biosecurity leaflets regarding the preventative measures that can be taken by both [commercial](#) and [non-intensive](#) pig farmers are also available in the disease control section of the Department website at [DAFM - African Swine Fever](#).

African swine fever is a **notifiable** disease under Irish law and if you suspect the presence of ASF you must contact your Private Veterinary Practitioner or notify the Department immediately by contacting your local [Regional Veterinary Office](#) or by calling 1850 200 456.

National Disease Control Centre Division

ⁱ With the exception of the island of Sardinia where the disease has been present for many years