Policy paper

Contingency plan for exotic notifiable diseases of animals in England 2018: summary for animal keepers

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Contents

1. Vigilance and biosecurity
2. Animal keeper responsibilities
3. Actions if disease is suspected or confirmed
4. Movement controls and licences
5. Communications
6. Depopulation
7. Valuation and compensation
8. Cleansing and disinfection
9. Compartmentalisation
10. Restocking
11. Vaccination
12. Trade, import and export

This publication summarises key points from the Contingency Plan for Exotic Notifiable Diseases of Animals in England.

It explains how animal keepers can help prevent diseases in animals, what they must do if they suspect disease and how the government responds to disease. Further information on how we will manage an outbreak is available in Part A of the plan. Information on how we prepare between outbreaks is available in Part B.

The responsibility for preventing outbreaks of exotic notifiable disease, reporting suspicion and dealing with them when they do

occur is shared between government, operational partners and stakeholders.

A number of particularly dangerous animal diseases which are not usually present in England are controlled by law – we refer to these as ‘exotic notifiable diseases’ in this plan.

Stakeholders include all those who may be affected by an outbreak of exotic notifiable disease. This includes the farming industry and rural businesses, as well as those keeping animals for any purpose, for example as companion animals/pets.

There are clear legal requirements on animal keepers (for example reporting notifiable disease, complying with any restrictions, maintaining any records required by law, undertaking and paying for final cleansing and disinfection). But there are also clear practical advantages for stakeholders and government alike when responsibility is shared.

Vigilance and biosecurity

As animal keepers you are responsible for the health and welfare of your animals. You should check and monitor for any signs of ill health. These could be changes in behaviour, a loss of condition, lameness, stopping eating or drinking, vocalising more or developing skin or hide lesions.

You should follow good biosecurity at all times, regularly check the health of your livestock, poultry and individual animals, and monitor them for changes in production. Reviewing production records can help you to detect disease early. If you are concerned about the health of your animals (including birds and companion animals/pets) you should consult your vet promptly.

The term biosecurity encompasses all measures that prevent or reduce the risk of disease entering or becoming established in kept animals, or from spreading once disease occurs. You should comply

with import restrictions. Read our biosecurity guidance and a list of approved disinfectants.

A number of industry-led initiatives can help you increase biosecurity on your premises. For example:

- the Red Tractor code of practice for on-farm feeding
- the British Lion code of practice for the egg industry
- the Equine Industry biosecurity guidance

You should have your own plans so that you know what you would do if an animal disease is suspected or confirmed.

Animal keeper responsibilities

If you notice clinical signs in any of your animals, including companion animals, or a change in production causes you to suspect a notifiable disease, you are required by law to report that suspicion to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) via the Defra rural services helpline on 03000 200 301.

If you are not sure about the significance of the signs you should discuss first with your own vet. If suspicion of a notifiable disease remains, you must make sure that APHA are notified promptly. Your own vet may seek a consultation with APHA as necessary.

Actions if disease is suspected or confirmed

On suspicion

When you report a suspected exotic notifiable disease to APHA, we (APHA) will assess your call. If appropriate, we will launch an official investigation and send a veterinary inspector (VI) to your premises to conduct a veterinary inquiry.

The purpose of the veterinary inquiry is to establish if disease is present, or may have been present, on your premises. If so, we need to find out for how long, where it may have come from, and where it may have spread to.

We will immediately put in place temporary statutory restrictions which the VI will confirm in writing when they arrive. In addition, we will specify the biosecurity requirements you must comply with. For example, you may need to provide a means of cleansing and disinfection (C&D) at the entrances and exits of the premises and buildings or warning signs at appropriate places.

We will prohibit the movements of animals to and from the premises. It is highly unlikely that we would licence any movements at this stage. You will need to stop all visits to the premises (including regular visits such as fallen stock or pest control), except those that are specifically permitted under licence.

You will need a licence to move anything on or off your premises. You should discuss your licence requirements with our veterinary inspector (VI).

You must provide information required by official inspectors. You must help them in investigating and controlling disease. You may need to provide details of production records, and details of movements of animals and other things liable to transmit disease, on and off the premises.

The VI will advise whether footpaths should be closed on your premises.

These restrictions apply to all premises where disease is reported, whether it’s a farm or a private dwelling. We will adjust the restrictions as appropriate to the circumstances at the specific premises.

While carrying out the veterinary inquiry, the VI will conduct a clinical examination of your animals and an inspection of your production and

animal movement records. If disease cannot be ruled out at this stage the VI will take samples for laboratory testing. In certain circumstances the VI may require animals to be humanely destroyed. The VImay impose further restrictions – you will need to make sure that you understand and comply with them.

Depending on the disease concerned the restrictions may apply to your whole premises or to individual animals. They will usually include a ban on the movement of susceptible animals on and off your premises. They may also include restrictions on anything else that is liable to transmit disease, such as meat, products, equipment, vehicles and manure.

We will leave the restrictions in place until we can rule out an exotic notifiable disease. If we confirm disease then the restrictions will remain in place. The occupier of the premises is responsible for making sure that the restrictions are observed.

The aim of our restrictions is to prevent the spread of disease. There will inevitably be some disruption to normal business for those affected.

We may also declare a temporary control zone (TCZ) around a premises where we suspect disease. We are most likely to do this if we suspect diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Avian Influenza (AI), Classical Swine fever (CSF), African Swine Fever (ASF) and African Horse Sickness (AHS). If your premises is within a TCZ, you will have to comply with the conditions and restrictions stated in that declaration, even if you do not suspect disease at your own premises.

You should have plans in place to deal with prolonged movement restrictions. Pressures on accommodation can arise quickly. This applies to farmed animals and domestic pets but is especially challenging in the pig and poultry sectors.

Further detail can be found in Part A (page 7) of the contingency plan, and also in our individual disease control strategies.

On confirmation

If we confirm a notifiable exotic disease in England, Defra will take action – in partnership with operational partners and stakeholders to:

- stamp out the disease, so that we can regain our disease-free status. This may involve the disease control measures described in this publication
- protect the health and safety both of the public and of those directly involved in controlling the outbreak
- keep to a minimum the economic effects on the taxpayer, the public and the farming industry

Within its disease control objective, Defra aims to:

- keep to a minimum the number of animals that die or need to be humanely destroyed, whether for disease control purposes or to safeguard animal health and welfare
- balance adverse effects on animal health and welfare, the rural and wider economy, the public, rural communities and the environment

For most diseases, we will do this by:

- taking action on the infected premises (IP) and other premises (contact premises) where disease is most likely to have spread from and to
- declaring movement control zones such as protection zones (PZ), surveillance zones (SZ) or restricted zones (RZ) as required by EU and national legislation. This includes animal controls and controls on animal products, taking into account the risk of disease spread. In the case of Foot and Mouth Disease, the GB administrations will immediately impose movement restrictions across the whole of Great Britain if disease is confirmed
- restricting activities that might increase the risk of spread – for example there might be a ban on hunting or shooting
- considering banning gatherings of animals including shows or market
- considering export bans
- considering compulsory housing of animals susceptible to the disease

- investigating the origin of the disease and determining whether there has been further spread of disease from that source
- completing other surveillance to investigate possible further spread of disease

If disease is confirmed on your premises you will need to continue to comply with the restrictions and measures put in place on your farm until the disease is stamped out and restrictions are lifted.

If your premises is located within a declared disease control zone, you must comply with the conditions and restrictions which apply within the zone. You may also be required to carry out additional biosecurity measures. You must watch particularly carefully for any signs of disease and report any suspicions immediately to APHA.

Further detail can be found in Part A (page 14) of the contingency plan and within our individual disease control strategies.

Movement controls and licences

Licensing

We may allow specific, limited individual movements of animals, using specific licences. Whether we do so will depend on the circumstances, and will be subject to veterinary risk assessment and statutory requirements. These licences would set out criteria (veterinary inspection, cleansing and disinfection and monitoring) that you would need to meet, before, during or after the move. You must comply with restrictions and with all conditions in order to minimise the risk of spread of disease.

We will keep you informed of the disease situation. We will provide guidance on how to apply for movement licences on gov.uk. We will also publish information about the likely timing of changes to

restrictions within zones. Control strategies and legislation already set out the minimum duration of zones and controls within them.

Welfare moves

You are responsible for the welfare of your animals. Where animals are suffering due to overcrowding, you may have to humanely destroy those animals; no compensation will be paid for any animals humanely destroyed as a result. In exceptional circumstances, we may consider arranging disposal (at your own cost).

Once we have put movement restriction zones in place, we will consider whether licences can be made available to permit certain essential movements for welfare purposes. This might cover cases like dairy cow movements for milking, movements to permit treatment by veterinary surgeons. In all cases it will be subject to assessment of the risk. Strict conditions will apply to these licences, ensuring such moves take place under suitable biosecurity arrangements. We will respond to requests for welfare moves as quickly as possible. We will explain our decisions clearly.

Regionalisation

We may be able to divide the country into areas defined as free of disease, low risk areas and high risk areas. This would depend on the disease situation, and would depend on our assessments of risk. We call this “regionalisation”. We would impose restrictions on animal and animal product movements based on protecting each region’s disease status. Further detail can be found in part A (page 61) of the contingency plan.

Communications

For each outbreak or incident of exotic notifiable disease of animals, we make sure that we provide accurate, timely updates on the latest situation, as well as guidance for those affected. In the event of a disease outbreak, you should read our guidance on the relevant animal disease.

We specifically contact livestock keepers and veterinary practices using a combination of text messages (SMS), voicemail, email and fax messages. We may also distribute information packs to livestock premises within PZs and SZs set up to control livestock diseases. We encourage livestock keepers to sign up to these alerts. We may also use national stakeholder groups to communicate.

Depopulation

For many diseases our policy is to quickly cull affected animals to prevent the spread of the disease. For livestock diseases, this may involve the depopulation (also referred to as culling) of whole herds of animals. For other diseases such as Equine Infectious Anaemia and Rabies, only single animals may need to be humanely destroyed.

We may consider sparing certain limited categories of animals, such as rare species or breeds at risk, so long as this does not compromise our work to control the disease. You can tell APHA officials about any at risk breeds if they visit your farm or premises during a disease outbreak, but it is better if you send a completed animal breeds at risk registration form to APHA.

We make decisions to spare on a case by case basis. A vet will carry out a risk assessment of the premises. There are no guarantees an animal or bird will be spared – decisions aren't made automatically.

If you keep animals from breeds which are on the breeds at risk list, you must have plans for what to do if there is a disease outbreak. We have published our advisory committee's guidelines to help breed societies develop a contingency plan in the event of a possible exotic disease outbreak.

We arrange depopulation and also dispose of affected carcases. You are normally responsible for biosecure disposal of other materials such as bedding.

Further detail can be found in Part A (page 49) of the contingency plan.

Valuation and compensation

When an animal is destroyed in order to control an exotic notifiable disease, there are laws which set out whether you are entitled to compensation and if so what rate you are paid.

Where we need to pay you compensation, we will make sure that the animal is valued in accordance with the relevant laws. Depending on the disease, either:

- an accredited valuer will be used to value the animals
- we will use valuation rate cards and a fixed table will be used
- the amount of compensation payable may be set in law

Under certain disease laws, animal owners may dispute our valuation.

Further detail can be found in Part A (page 53) of the contingency plan.

Cleansing and disinfection

Premises and potentially contaminated transport and equipment will need to be cleansed and disinfected. This will need to be done once the animals which may catch the disease have been destroyed, and their carcases have been safely disposed of. We do this to prevent disease spreading from the premises. We also do this so that when the premises are re-stocked, the disease won’t occur again.

We carry out preliminary disinfection as soon as depopulation is completed and all carcases have been removed. This is done at our cost.

You – as the occupier of the premises – are responsible for secondary/final cleansing and disinfection (and it's done at your cost). For most diseases, we will not allow restocking until this secondary cleansing and disinfection has been completed.

Further detail on cleansing and disinfection can be found in part A (page 54) of the contingency plan.

Compartmentalisation

EU legislation enables intra-EU trade to resume relatively quickly once a disease is under control. However, it can take many months before trade can start again with third country trading partners.

Compartmentalisation is an approach which allows companies, in the event of a disease outbreak, to resume trade with member states and/or 'third countries' who have signed up to the scheme. Companies must meet the conditions of European Commission (EC) regulation 616/2009, which includes strict biosecurity measures and the requirement for premises to be approved by government. Poultry premises may apply for approval or re-inspection for compartmentalisation.

Restocking

We may allow controlled restocking after appropriate cleansing and disinfection.

With certain diseases we may allow controlled restocking. We may allow a limited numbers of animals onto the premises (sentinel animals) which can be observed to make sure that disease is no

longer present. In some cases, samples will be taken from these sentinel animals for laboratory testing. We do that to confirm that disease no longer exists on the premises before all restrictions are lifted and you are allowed to restock completely.

For other diseases – particularly if there are prolonged outbreaks, or if secondary cleansing and disinfection is not carried out – it may not be possible to restock a premises for several months.

Further detail can be found in the disease control strategies for each disease about restocking requirements.

- Notifiable Avian Disease Control Strategy for Great Britain
- Foot and Mouth Disease Control Strategy for Great Britain
- Rabies Disease Control Strategy for Great Britain
- Bluetongue Great Britain Disease Control Strategy
- Disease Control Strategy for African and Classical Swine Fever in Great Britain
- African Horse Sickness Control Strategy
- Lumpy Skin Disease Control Strategy for Great Britain

Vaccination

Our published control strategies set out our policy on vaccination for each disease. In general, we may consider vaccination as a control tool as part of wider disease control strategies. This can help move towards the overall goal of eradicating the disease where it is practical to do so, and the full benefits outweigh the wider costs. In the short term, vaccination can help slowdown, reduce and potentially prevent disease spread.

Vaccination can have significant costs for industry and government. Vaccination also has wider implications for effective monitoring of disease spread, and for trade and movements of animals. Vaccination is disease specific and vaccines may not be available for all exotic notifiable diseases. We will carefully consider a range of technical and other issues in balancing the costs and benefits of deploying vaccine.

We have prepared emergency vaccination plans and control strategies for FMDcovering what we would do if a decision to vaccinate was taken. We have made our plans in accordance with EU requirements. We might also consider vaccination for other diseases including, but not limited to, rabies, CSF, bluetongue, lumpy skin disease and AHS.

Preparations in England

Defra has established a number of contractual arrangements to provide emergency vaccination services. A range of potential providers are included: one or more companies could be appointed as vaccination contractor to carry out vaccination within England. This includes the potential to vaccinate for FMD, lumpy skin disease, CSF and for any other diseases for which vaccination is required, under the direction of APHA.

Trade, import and export

In the event of a disease outbreak or incident and depending on the disease, the UK may lose its OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) international disease free status. This may result in some countries no longer accepting animals or their products from the UK.

Within the EU, depending on the disease, there may also be a ban on trade of susceptible animals, animal products, meat or meat products and milk and dairy products from the whole country or parts of it. If there is a ban on trading these products within the EU, they may be able to be traded within the GB market if handled and marked with a specific domestic health mark applied to the carcase or packaging. These arrangements will always depend on the specific disease and any movement restrictions in place.

For trade with non-EU countries, we may need to withdraw export certificates until the situation has been clarified with the importing country.

Trade restrictions can remain in place for a long time, even after the disease has been tackled and disease free status has been re-established. Trade is important for the financial viability of the sector, so we will work closely with trading partners to make sure that trade can start again as quickly as possible.