



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Websites:
www.consumer.org.my

Letter to the Editor

29 December 2021

CAP: What Malaysians need to know about the African swine fever?

African swine fever (ASF) is a devastating infectious disease of pigs, usually deadly. No vaccine exists to combat this virus. It does not affect humans nor does it affect other animal species other than pigs and wild boars. It can be transmitted either via direct animal contact or via the dissemination of contaminated food (e.g. sausages or uncooked meat).

On 17 December, the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) confirmed that African swine fever (ASF) was detected in wild boar in Bidor and Sungkai in Perak and Jerantut in Pahang. The department said in a statement that the spread of the viral disease is under control and does not include commercial pigs.

However, a week later an outbreak of ASF was reported in seven commercial pig farms in Paya Mengkuang at Masjid Tanah, Malacca.

Among the measures taken by the (DVS) to contain the ASF outbreak was to issue the Quarantine Order Notice to the relevant pig farms and to restrict pig movements. Pigs from the relevant farms will also be destroyed under Section 19 of the Animals Act 1953 (Amendment 2013) while pigs from farms that are certified infection-free are allowed to be slaughtered in approved slaughterhouses only, however, the carcasses and pork are not allowed to be transported to other states.

DVS also assured consumers that ASF is not a zoonotic disease that means it is not contagious to humans; however, as a safety measure, pork must be cooked at a temperature of at least 70 ° C for 30 minutes to kill the virus

What is of concern is that ASF is a contagious, untreatable and often fatal virus and is sweeping the global pig population. Even though humans cannot contract the disease, scientists have warned that pig physiology is close to human physiology, and that future mutation of the virus may therefore become dangerous to human beings.

The most common symptoms of the virus in its acute form are a high temperature and loss of appetite; other symptoms include vomiting, diarrhoea, and difficulty with breathing and standing. There is no treatment for the disease some versions can have a [100% mortality rate](#) in certain circumstances. It is not the same as swine flu.

ASF can be transmitted through direct contact with infected animals. Wild boars have been identified as one of several possible culprits for the recent spread. It can also spread via insects such as ticks.

Another concern with ASF is that the virus can be transmitted through humans tracking manure or other bodily secretions from location to location which serves as a mechanical vector of the virus.

According to a World Organisation for Animal Health alert the first discovery of the disease in Malaysia,

was reported in mid-February this year. It was detected in at least 300 pigs in three districts - Pitas, Kota Marudu and Beluran in Sabah.

The virus can also [survive several months](#) in processed meat, and several years in frozen carcasses, so meat products are a particular concern for cross-border transmission.

[It is believed](#) that the disease was initially brought from east Africa through contaminated pig products. For many years ASF was found mainly in Africa, although there was an outbreak in Europe in the 1950s which took several decades to eradicate. In 2007, the virus was detected in Georgia, and despite co-ordinate efforts, it has since spread widely, initially through eastern Europe and Russia, and more recently into western Europe, when [wild boar in Belgium](#) were found to have the disease. The virus has now jumped to China, home to half the world's domestic pigs, and appears to be proliferating rapidly

National governments around the world are now ramping up precautions in order to protect their domestic pig industries. Denmark has been planning to build a wall to keep out wild boar for some time now, and France is also making [plans for a wall](#) along with parts of the Belgian border. Germany has [relaxed laws on wild boar](#) hunting as part of its plans to prevent the disease from breaking out.

It is also reported that the ASF virus can survive for a long time in uncooked or even cured meats and the virus was found to survive for over a year in a certain type of ham. Transmission in meat and/or meat scraps being fed to pigs is one of the ways ASF has been moving throughout Eastern Europe and China.

As foods that contain meat and meat products are capable of spreading the ASF virus Malaysian authorities should immediately ban the feeding of swill (food scrap/food waste) to pigs in the country.

Mohideen Abdul Kader
President
Consumers Association of Penang