

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

Work in Response to African Swine Fever Cases in Hong Kong

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the Government's work in response to the outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF) in Hong Kong.

BACKGROUND

2. Since the first ASF outbreak on the Mainland reported on 3 August 2018, the Government has been closely monitoring the situation, heightening vigilance and implementing corresponding preventive measures to minimise the risk of ASF infection in live pigs in Hong Kong, as well as to ensure steady supply of live pigs for consumption by the public. Members were briefed on the details of the disease and preventive measures adopted by the Government in November 2018 vide ACFEH Paper No. 7/2018.

3. On 10 May and 31 May 2019, pig samples collected in Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse (SSSH) tested positive for ASF virus. The Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (DAFC) declared SSSH as an infected place under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Regulations (Cap. 139A) in order to prevent the virus from spreading from SSSH. A total of 10 675 pigs in SSSH were culled on the two occasions, followed with thorough cleansing and disinfection before re-opening.

STRENGTHENING MEASURES

4. To prevent ASF, control and surveillance at source are of utmost importance. Owing to the ASF cases in Hong Kong, we have reviewed the existing preventative measures and contingency plans in consultation with experts, and made improvements in various areas in collaboration with stakeholders concerned.

5. The Mainland's General Administration of Customs (GAC) has been exercising stringent inspection and quarantine on the live pigs supplied to Hong Kong. All pigs must come from registered pig farms. As the incubation period of ASF virus is usually 4 to 19 days, the pigs must be segregated for 15 days to ensure that they are free of ASF symptoms before being discharged from farms. Health certificates will then be issued by the Mainland Customs. Monitoring and inspection are conducted at all checkpoints during transportation as well as in and out of Qingshuihe Transfer House located in Shenzhen. Pigs showing abnormality at any stage will not be supplied to Hong Kong. The efficacy of the Mainland's system is shown in a case on 15 August 2019 where during the active surveillance work of the Shenzhen Customs a dead pig suspected to have infected with ASF was intercepted from supplying to Hong Kong, and as a follow-up Qingshuihe Transfer House was temporarily closed for cleansing and disinfection. While the closure caused a reduction in supply of fresh pork for several days, it also minimised the risk of spreading of ASF from the Mainland to Hong Kong.

6. In addition, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will ensure at Man Kam To Control Point that all Mainland live pigs arriving in Hong Kong are accompanied with valid health certificates issued by the Mainland Customs. It will also closely monitor the health conditions of live pigs entering Hong Kong to avoid the spreading of ASF.

7. It is an internationally recognised practice to carry out ASF screening among pigs through inspection of clinical symptoms. All local and imported pigs have to undergo stringent ante-mortem and post-mortem inspections in the slaughterhouses to ensure that pigs supplied to the market are fit for human consumption.

8. Regarding local supply of live pigs, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) will continue to implement various preventive measures against ASF, including suspending the importation of breeders from the Mainland, requesting pig farmers to adopt proper biosecurity measures; strictly controlling the vehicles and personnel entering pig farms; strengthening periphery of pig farms to prevent wild pigs from entering, recommending pig farmers to ban staff from bringing pork and pork products into the farms, enhancing the cleansing and disinfection of vehicles and personnel entering and leaving pig farms as well as carefully handling excrement, etc. AFCD has also amended the licence conditions for livestock keeping to ban the storage or use of swill of pork origin or in contact with pork or pork products as feed from 12 January 2019 to minimise the risk of spreading ASF virus to pigs via swill.

In addition, AFCD has also recommended pig farmers to notify AFCD immediately to conduct disease investigation and collect samples for testing if pigs are suspected to be infected with ASF.

9. The two local slaughterhouses located in Sheung Shui and Tsuen Wan have strengthened the cleansing and disinfection work in various areas, including the vehicles and personnel entering and leaving the slaughterhouses, lairages and the slaughter lines, to prevent spreading of ASF virus. To ensure that vehicles could only leave the slaughterhouse after they are thoroughly cleansed and disinfected, apart from installing disinfection pool at the entrance of SSSH to thoroughly disinfect the wheels of vehicles entering and leaving SSSH, equipment such as pressurised water pumps and hot water high pressure jets, etc. has also been installed at the slaughterhouses. Additional manpower resources are also deployed to supervise the cleansing work in order to minimise the risk of spreading ASF virus via pig-carrying trucks.

10. In addition, the daily clearance arrangement has been implemented in the two slaughterhouses since 6 June 2019, i.e. all live pigs entering the slaughterhouses will be slaughtered within 24 hours. Under this arrangement, the lairages in different locations in the slaughterhouses were cleared for thorough cleansing and disinfection on a daily basis, thereby minimising the chance for pigs to get infected in the slaughterhouses. So far, the implementation was smooth and effective. The successful implementation of the daily clearance arrangement together with strengthened cleansing and disinfection implemented in the slaughterhouses have substantially reduced the risk of ASF infection and the virus from being carried from slaughterhouses to local farms.

CONCLUSION

11. Overseas experience shows that it may take years, if not decades, for a place to put ASF under control. The threat of ASF is expected to linger on the Mainland in the foreseeable future. As Hong Kong relies heavily on imported pigs for supplying fresh pork, we need to stay vigilant to prevent the spreading of ASF to Hong Kong. According to some experts, future detection of ASF virus in slaughterhouses may be inevitable, and despite culling and movement restrictions are recognised as an effective way to control disease outbreaks, other risk management solutions to reduce the viral load should also be further explored. We will constantly review our prevention, control and surveillance work in the light of expert opinions to ensure that they are reasonable and to minimise the impact on public and various stakeholders.

12. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Food and Health Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
August 2019**