



Swine Influenza Surveillance: Information for Farmers & Vets in Great Britain



1. National Swine Influenza Surveillance Programme

The Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) has run a national swine influenza surveillance programme since 1991, funded by Defra. This provides free-of-charge laboratory testing for the detection of swine influenza viruses from clinical samples from affected pigs submitted by veterinary surgeons to VLA Regional Laboratories and Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) Veterinary Services, via the SAC Disease Surveillance Centres.

2. What samples should be submitted?

At this time, heightened awareness and investigation of suspected cases of swine influenza as part of the Defra-funded national swine influenza surveillance programme is advised. In consultation with your veterinary surgeon, samples to submit to VLA Regional Laboratories or SAC Disease Surveillance Centres for free virus isolation testing include:

- Affected moribund pigs and/or;
- Fresh carcasses of affected pigs that have died within the past 24 hours, and/or;
- Fresh tissues collected post-mortem from each affected pig examined, including:
 - Trachea (best material for virus isolation)
 - Affected lung tissue from any pigs with pneumonia
 - Tonsil
- Nasal swabs can also be collected from acutely affected pigs.

Note that only tissue samples of the same type from different pigs should be pooled together.

At this time we recommend that serology is not the best tool to use for the investigation of pandemic (H1N1) virus. However, it is still appropriate to collect paired blood samples (21 day sampling interval) from affected pigs for retrospective analysis. A minimum of 2ml clotted blood is required per sample, per pig.

3. What will I have to pay for?

Laboratory testing for the detection of swine influenza viruses (by virus isolation) of any tissue samples collected post-mortem either at the VLA/SAC or by your own veterinary surgeon is free-of-charge. Equally, virus isolation for the detection of swine influenza viruses from nasal swabs is free-of-charge.

Please note that if you or your veterinary surgeon submit affected pigs and/or pig carcasses to a VLA Regional Laboratory or SAC Disease Surveillance Centre you will be charged the standard current rate for the post-mortem examination of pigs/pig carcasses.

- VLA 'Disease surveillance' charges can be found at: http://www.defra.gov.uk/vla/services/ser_tests.htm;
- SAC Farm Animal Disease Diagnostics information can be found at: <http://www.sac.ac.uk/consulting/services/s-z/veterinary/services/disdiagnostics/farmanimals/howtouse>.

Testing of blood samples for the detection of antibodies would be charged at the standard, current VLA or SAC rates for the specific tests required.

4. How many pigs should be sampled?

If you are submitting affected pigs to the VLA or SAC, please discuss the case with a Veterinary Investigation Officer – see question 5 below.

For post-mortem examinations that are not carried out at a VLA Regional Laboratory or SAC Disease Surveillance Centre, at least three affected pig carcasses should be examined, with samples collected as described above.

When collecting nasal swabs (for attempted virus isolation, as above) or blood samples (for retrospective serological testing to detect antibodies) it is recommended to sample at least 10 pigs from the affected group.

5. Where should I send samples for investigation of suspected swine influenza to and how should they be transported?

Contact your local VLA Regional Laboratory or SAC Disease Surveillance Centre to discuss requirements with a Veterinary Investigation Officer.

Contact information can be found at:

- VLA: http://www.defra.gov.uk/vla/vla/vla_contacts.htm
- SAC: <http://www.sac.ac.uk/consulting/services/s-z/veterinary/contact/vetlocations/>

6. How do you know the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus is in pigs?

Defra continuously monitors the pig population of Great Britain for the circulation of influenza viruses. Currently there is evidence of the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus having infected pig herds in several different countries across the world subsequent to its emergence in humans. This now includes several European countries including the UK (Northern Ireland and England), Eire, Norway, Iceland and Finland with the situation dynamic and changing almost daily.

7. What are the clinical signs in pigs infected with influenza virus?

Infection can cause a range of clinical signs in pigs, from sudden onset, severe respiratory illness that infects a large number of exposed pigs, often with little death, to less severe illness that may be characterised as a chronic respiratory disease syndrome, usually affecting groups of pigs. Breeding pigs can also suffer reproductive problems, and pigs can also be infected and not show signs of illness. Recovery in uncomplicated infections is usually quick (within 10-14 days).

8. If I suspect influenza infection in my herd, where can I get more information?

Leading industry organisations, in collaboration with VLA, SAC and Defra, have published a Code of Practice entitled 'Influenza in Pigs' in response to the emergence and spread of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 in people. This information can be found at:

http://www.bpex.org.uk/articles/298893/Influenza_in_Pigs_Code_of_Practice.aspx

Information about swine influenza surveillance in Great Britain can also be found at:

http://www.defra.gov.uk/vla/diseases/dis_si.htm

In Northern Ireland, information about swine influenza can be found on the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) website at: <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index.htm>

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