



# WA livestock disease outlook

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## Recent livestock disease cases in WA

### Sudden death in Angus calves in the South-West

- Four six-month-old Angus calves died suddenly from a mob of 53. The calves had been grazing pasture. Another mob of cows on the property had no deaths reported.
- The carcasses of the calves had bloated very rapidly and were leaking unclotted blood from the eyes, nose, mouth and anus.
- Sudden death and bloody discharges from body openings can be signs of anthrax. As anthrax is a serious zoonotic (disease that can be caught by people), the vet did not carry out a post-mortem but collected samples and had them tested to rule out anthrax. All samples tested negative. Testing was subsidised as anthrax is a [reportable disease](#).
- Anthrax is a bacterial disease most commonly seen in cattle, sheep and goats. The only outbreak that has occurred in WA was in 1994. However, the anthrax bacterium forms spores that can remain in the environment and present a risk of infection for decades. Read more on our website on [anthrax](#).
- People can contract anthrax through handling infected animals, their carcasses, and infected animal products. If you suspect an animal has died from anthrax, do not touch or move the carcass. Contact your [DPIRD field vet](#), who will collect samples to test for anthrax.
- Based on the history and once anthrax had been ruled out, the likely cause of death was thought to be blackleg, as the calves had not been vaccinated. The remaining calves were vaccinated and no further deaths occurred.
- Read more on [vaccinating against cattle diseases](#).

### Photosensitisation in 100 Merino cross lambs

- Three-month-old Merino cross lambs developed irritation and swelling around the face, and some had peeling of the tips of the ears. 100 lambs were affected from a mob of 600.
- The lambs were grazing mixed pasture consisting of clover, grasses and broadleaf weeds.
- Post-mortem of two lambs and laboratory testing suggested that the cause of the facial lesions was primary photosensitisation. Primary photosensitisation can result from eating plants that contain photosensitising substances.
- Removing stock from the toxin source and keeping them out of direct sunlight will normally result in recovery.
- The samples were also tested for exotic diseases with signs similar to photosensitisation, including sheep pox, [bluetongue disease](#) and [foot-and-mouth](#). All tested negative. This testing was subsidised as the results will contribute to evidence of WA's ongoing freedom from these diseases and support our ability to market our livestock.
- Read more on the DPIRD webpage on [photosensitisation](#).

## In early spring, watch out for these livestock diseases:

Disease	Typical history and signs
<p><b>Polioencephalomalacia (PEM) in sheep and cattle</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thiamine (vitamin B1) deficiency is the most common cause of PEM in WA</li> <li>• Most often occurs in WA when there is a sudden change to feed composition. All ages and classes can be affected.</li> <li>• Most outbreaks involve only a few animals in the mob but can result in death rates as high as 10%.</li> <li>• Signs include muscle twitching, seizures, head pressing, blindness, paddling and head thrown back, death.</li> <li>• Animals treated in the early stages with thiamine may recover. Read more about treatment on our <a href="#">PEM webpage</a>.</li> <li>• Eligible disease investigations can be subsidised – contact your <a href="#">DPIRD field vet</a> for information.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Worms in sheep and cattle</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More on <a href="#">sheep worm control</a></li> <li>• More on <a href="#">beef cattle worm control</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signs of Barber’s pole worms include bottlejaw, fluid-filled abdomen, anaemia and sudden deaths. Other worm species may cause lost productivity, ill-thrift, weakness and diarrhoea.</li> <li>• Young sheep and cattle require good worm control to achieve their potential growth rate.</li> <li>• High stocking rates favour the spread of worms. Lambs will require an effective drench at weaning and ideally be put onto a paddock with a low worm burden.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Worm egg counts</a> are a useful tool to measure drench effectiveness. See the sheep Drench Decision Guide on the <a href="#">Wormboss website</a> or the <a href="#">DPIRD website on drench resistance</a>.</li> </ul>

## Some feeds can make pigs sick and bring diseases into Australia

Feeding pigs with any products that contain or have had contact with meat is illegal because the meat can contain viruses that can cause diseases in pigs, as well as spreading diseases to other livestock via pigs. These diseases include [foot-and-mouth disease](#), Aujeszky’s disease and [African swine fever](#).

Some small-scale pig owners or owners of pet pigs may not be aware that feeding kitchen scraps or catering/deli/grocery waste to pigs is illegal unless it is free of any meat products and has not had any contact with meat.

See the [DPIRD pig feed webpage](#) for more information about what pigs should eat.

See over for information on the spread of African swine fever in China and now into Western Europe.

## WA Livestock Disease Outlook – exotic disease alert

### WA pig owners reminded to be on guard for African swine fever (ASF) – spreading in China and Europe

Western Australian pig producers are reminded to be vigilant about biosecurity measures on their properties as African swine fever (ASF) continues to spread in China and Europe.

ASF is a highly contagious viral disease of pigs that is not present in Australia. It does not affect human health and pig meat is safe to eat.

#### Current situation

ASF has historically been widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, and spread to Eastern Europe and Russia within the last 10–12 years. On 3 August 2018, the world's largest pig producer, China, reported its first outbreak of ASF, and as of 5 October, 34 farms/abattoirs across eight provinces had been affected. In September 2018, ASF was also detected in Western Europe (Belgium) for the first time.



**Figure 1:** Pigs infected with ASF can display skin redness and blue areas (tip of ears, below the knees, tail, perianal area, chest and abdomen). This pig has reddened ears, conjunctivitis and had a high temperature (over 41°C).

Photo: The [Pirbright Institute](#).

There has never been a case of ASF in Australia. These international events highlight the real risk posed by ASF and the importance of early detection of emergency animal diseases. Continual and strong biosecurity practices are vital to prevent the introduction and spread of disease.

#### Signs of ASF

ASF can affect pigs of all ages.

Disease signs include high fever, 'blotching' of the skin, lack of coordination, reluctance to stand, diarrhoea, red or blue-coloured skin (particularly around the ears and snout), coughing and difficulty breathing. Death rates are often very high.

There are no treatments or vaccines available.

## Recommended biosecurity for pig owners

Pigs usually become infected with ASF through direct contact with infected pigs, by contact with contaminated vehicles, equipment or clothing or by eating infected pig meat or pig products.

Producers can take steps to reduce the risk of ASF entering their property if it were to reach Australia. It is recommended that producers:

- Ensure workers who have travelled to countries where ASF has been reported do not enter the pig farm for 7 days, and ensure they are in clean clothes and boots.
- Limit visitors to pig farms.
- Ask visitors to confirm in the visitor's log that they have:
  - showered and changed clothes and boots since their last contact with pigs
  - not returned from countries where ASF has been reported in the last 7 days.
- Provide clean clothes and boots for visitors.
- **Ensure all feed suppliers and workers are aware that it is illegal to feed meat, meat products or products that have had contact with meat to pigs.**
- See the [DPIRD pig feed webpage](#) for more information on prohibited pig feed (swill feeding).

Read more about pig biosecurity on the [Farm Biosecurity website](#).

## You can protect WA's pigs – report any signs of ASF or illegal feeding of pigs

ASF is a [reportable disease](#) and early intervention is vital to prevent its spread. If you suspect ASF, you must report it immediately to the Department via your local [DPIRD field veterinary officer](#) or through the Emergency Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888.

If you suspect that a business is supplying feed for pigs that may contain meat or have had contact with meat, or that a producer is feeding these products, contact your [DPIRD field vet](#).

For more information about ASF, see the [DPIRD webpage](#) and the federal [Department of Agriculture and Water Resource's webpage](#).

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## WA Livestock Disease Outlook highlights benefits of surveillance

Australia's ability to sell livestock and livestock products depends on evidence from our surveillance systems that we are free of livestock diseases that are reportable or affect trade. The *WA livestock disease outlook – for producers* summarises recent significant disease investigations by Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development vets and private vets. Data from these investigations provide evidence that WA is free from these diseases and supports our continuing access to markets.

**We welcome feedback.** To provide comments or to [subscribe](#) to the monthly email newsletter, *WA livestock disease outlook*, email [waldo@agric.wa.gov.au](mailto:waldo@agric.wa.gov.au)

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