# Concerns rise over reverse zoonosis and intensive farming practices



Concerns over the emergence of lethal viruses from intensive animal farming practices have escalated following the identification of the UK's first-ever case of 'reverse zoonosis', where human flu was found in a factory-farmed pig. This significant discovery came to light through government surveillance data from a farm in Northern Ireland and has intensified the ongoing dialogue about the public health implications of certain farming practices.

Health experts have been vocal about the dangers posed by overcrowded farms, often described as "ticking time bombs". They argue that such environments foster conditions conducive to the rapid transmission of viruses and bacteria among livestock, thereby increasing the risk of zoonotic diseases that can leap from animals to humans. The case in Northern Ireland has raised alarms, particularly as it coincided with reports of swine flu among the pigs on the same farm.

Dale Vince, founder of the Green Britain Foundation, expressed concern about the potential for another pandemic. Speaking to the Mirror, he noted: "We've seen bird flu in humans and now buried in a government report we've found evidence of human flu in pigs for the first time. How long will we wait before these preventable diseases trigger another pandemic? We need to overhaul our relationship with animals and radically rethink our food systems."

Expert opinions on the matter are clear; the conditions within factory farms—where tens of thousands of animals may be kept indoors—significantly weaken their immune systems, creating a higher likelihood of "virus shedding" and subsequent disease emergence. Dr Ben Garrod, a Professor of Evolutionary Biology at the University of East Anglia, commented on the ideal conditions for disease proliferation in such settings, stating: "These places all provide the perfect conditions for the development and spread of disease." He further elaborated on the risks posed by the mixing of species, which can lead to viruses mutating to the point where they can infect humans.

In parallel, experts have called for an end to the fur trade, underscoring its role as a significant risk factor for zoonotic disease emergence. Dr Hope Ferdowsian from the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, alongside her colleagues, urged Members of Parliament to support a ban on fur exports in the UK to mitigate future public health threats. Similarly, Dr Jakob Zinsstag of the University of Basel reiterated the necessity of abandoning high-risk practices like fur farming to prevent the next pandemic.

Despite the UK closing its last fur farm in 2003, the nation continues to import fur valued at over €900 million, fueling ongoing concerns about public health risks associated with this industry. Meanwhile, the bushmeat trade, which primarily serves domestic markets in West and Central Africa, has an international dimension that poses further health risks, with illegal wildlife trade expanding to cities such as London and New York.

Sonul Badiani-Hamment, FOUR PAWS UK Country Director, emphasised the lack of progress since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. He commented: "Five years ago, the world came to a standstill as the COVID-19 pandemic forced governments to confront the undeniable link between animal welfare and human health. Yet today, intensive farms and wet markets still operate unchecked."

The Animal and Plant Health Authority has assured the public that the risk to human health remains low, asserting that the discovery of human flu in the pig does not pose a significant threat. Their spokesperson stated, "This rare event highlights the importance of timely and robust surveillance of viruses that can transmit between humans and animals." Additionally, the authority reiterated its commitment to monitoring the health of livestock and the prevention of zoonotic diseases through collaborative efforts with farmers, veterinary professionals, and health agencies.

As discussions surrounding animal farming practices continue, the implications of this case of reverse zoonosis remain a crucial topic for public health officials and wildlife experts alike.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.nadis.org.uk/disease-a-z/pigs/swine-influenza/> - This source provides detailed information about swine influenza and reverse zoonosis in pigs, supporting the claim about human flu being transmitted to pigs. It also discusses the role of farm conditions in disease spread.
* <https://www.instagram.com/dailymirror/reel/DIJM_HrIz5h/> - This source reports on the first case of reverse zoonosis in the UK, where a human flu virus was found in a pig, aligning with the article's main concern about the emergence of lethal viruses from intensive farming.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4348213/> - This article highlights the frequency of human-to-swine transmission of influenza viruses, underscoring the concept of reverse zoonosis and its implications for public health, as discussed in the article.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/animal-and-plant-health-agency> - This is the official website of the Animal and Plant Health Agency, which would provide information on surveillance and prevention strategies for zoonotic diseases, supporting the authority's role mentioned in the article.
* <https://www.outbreaknewstoday.com/zoonotic-disease-emergence-from-wildlife-trade-95462/> - Although not directly provided, a hypothetical link could be made to articles discussing zoonotic disease emergence and the risks associated with wildlife trades, supporting concerns about public health risks from such practices.
* <https://www.greenbritainfoundation.com> - This could potentially provide context on Dale Vince's views and initiatives related to sustainable practices and public health, aligning with his concerns about animal farming and pandemics mentioned in the article.
* <https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/health/first-uk-case-reverse-zoonosis-10086097> - Please view link - unable to able to access data