# Health experts warn of deadly viruses linked to animal farming and trade



Health specialists have raised alarm over the emergence of lethal viruses in environments commonly associated with animal farming and trade. The concerns centre around dirty farms and overcrowded markets, which are seen as potential hotspots for new viruses that could spill over into human populations. Experts are advocating for an end to the fur trade, which they label a "ticking time bomb," and also highlight the dangers posed by wet markets and the illegal wildlife trade.

Recently, a government report disclosed the UK's first known case of "reverse zoonosis," wherein human flu was detected in a factory-farmed pig in Northern Ireland. This finding is significant due to its implications for public health, especially as it emerged from surveillance data that also indicated ongoing swine flu cases among the pig population at the same farm. The situation aligns with previous documented occurrences of human-to-pig virus transmission in the United States, but this particular UK case had not previously been made public.

Dale Vince, founder of the Green Britain Foundation, expressed concern regarding the findings, stating, "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."

Experts are increasingly worried about the conditions within factory farms, where animals are often kept in overcrowded and stressful environments. Such conditions may weaken animals' immune systems and amplify the risk of viral transmission between species. Dr Ben Garrod, a Professor of Evolutionary Biology at the University of East Anglia, remarked on the potential for disease to proliferate in these settings, stating, "These places all provide the perfect conditions for the development and spread of disease, where multiple species are exposed to one another, typically in high numbers, often in highly stressful and unsanitary conditions."

In light of these concerns, a panel of specialists, including Dr Hope Ferdowsian from the University of New Mexico, recently called on UK lawmakers to consider a ban on the fur trade. This suggested ban arises from fears that the practice not only threatens animal welfare but could also pose significant public health risks. Dr Jakob Zinsstag from the University of Basel reinforced this, asserting that evidence indicates fur farming presents a significant risk of zoonotic disease emergence.

Compounding these issues is the bushmeat trade, which not only impacts local wildlife in regions like West and Central Africa but also feeds into an international network that supplies expatriate communities in major cities. This illicit trade heightens the risk of zoonotic diseases transferring to humans. Dr Garrod emphasised the need for stricter measures against the smuggling of wild animals, highlighting the dangers posed by the mixing of various species and the transportation of exotic animals across borders.

The Humane Society International UK, represented by senior director Claire Bass, described fur farms as a "ticking time bomb" for infectious diseases, noting their continued operation is a concerning indication of inadequate oversight. A proposal currently under discussion in Parliament seeks to position the UK as a frontrunner in ending the importation and sale of fur, highlighting a substantial gap despite having closed its last fur farm in 2003. The UK has nonetheless continued to import fur products valued at over €900 million.

In light of these developments, the Animal and Plant Health Authority has stated that the risk to human health from the identified case of reverse zoonosis remains low. The authority emphasised the importance of surveillance and monitoring to mitigate risks associated with viruses that can transmit between humans and animals. The spokesperson reiterated ongoing collaborations with farmers and veterinary services to ensure effective oversight of animal health.

The intertwining concerns regarding environmental and animal welfare practices, public health, and potential future disease outbreaks are underscored by these developments, prompting calls for a more concerted response to establish safer practices within industries connected to animal farming and wildlife trade.

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

## References

* <https://www.humaneworld.org/en/news/scientists-raise-alarm-over-public-health-dangers-fur-trade-39-potentially-high-risk-viruses> - This article highlights the public health risks associated with the fur trade, noting that fur farms act as potential hotspots for virus transmission and calling for an end to the industry due to these risks.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7399585/> - This article discusses how intensive animal farming and trade contribute to the emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases, underscoring concerns over overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in such settings.
* <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-livestock> - This page from the USDA details efforts to manage avian influenza in livestock, emphasizing the importance of biosecurity in preventing disease transmission between animals and humans.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This news source contains the original article discussing concerns over factory farming conditions and the emergence of zoonotic diseases, as well as proposals for bans on the fur trade in the UK.
* <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/swineflu/variant-flu.htm> - This CDC webpage provides information on swine flu in humans, aligning with the discussion on reverse zoonosis where human flu was detected in pigs, highlighting the risks of interspecies virus transmission.
* <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/wildlife-trade-increases-risk-zoonotic-disease> - This page from the UN Environment Programme discusses how the wildlife trade, including the bushmeat trade, increases the risk of zoonotic disease transmission due to the mixing of species and cross-border transportation.
* <https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/health/first-uk-case-reverse-zoonosis-10086097> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/uk-suffers-first-ever-case-31368183> - Please view link - unable to able to access data