# Health experts warn of pandemic risks linked to fur farms and factory farming



Health experts are intensifying their warnings regarding the potential public health risks posed by fur farms, factory farming, and the wildlife trade, labelling these practices as a ‘ticking time bomb’ for future pandemics. This alert follows a troubling incident in the UK where the first case of 'reverse zoonosis' was reported, with human influenza being identified in a pig on a factory farm in Northern Ireland, highlighting the interconnectedness of animal and human health.

The warning, reported by The Mirror, underscores the alarming conditions found in factory farms where large numbers of animals are confined in overcrowded and unhygienic settings. Health specialists argue that such environments are ideal for the rapid spread of infectious diseases among animals, which could later be transmitted to humans.

Dale Vince, founder of the Green Britain Foundation, expressed his concerns, 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." He further posed the question of how long society will wait before these preventable diseases lead to another pandemic, emphasising the need for a significant change in how humans interact with animals and manage food systems.

The recent identification of human flu in pigs is particularly concerning as it comes on the heels of earlier reports of swine flu circulating among livestock at the same facility. Although human-to-swine transmission has been documented previously in the USA, the UK case had remained largely unnoticed until now.

Experts like Dr. Hope Ferdowsian from the University of New Mexico School of Medicine advocate for legislative action, specifically calling for a ban on fur exports in the UK. She stated this is necessary to prevent future outbreaks and protect public health. Additionally, Dr. Jakob Zinsstag from the University of Basel echoed this sentiment, highlighting the significant risks posed by fur farming.

A recent study from China indicates that 39 viruses deemed potentially high-risk for human contagion were found in fur-farmed animals. The implications of these findings are particularly notable in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which there were over 400 outbreaks linked to mink farms in Europe and North America between April 2020 and February 2021. Despite closing its last fur farm in 2003, the UK has imported pelts worth over €900 million since that time.

Legislation is currently being considered in Parliament that could position the UK to lead global initiatives by implementing a ban on fur imports and sales. Claire Bass, senior director for campaigns and public affairs at Humane World for Animals UK, highlighted the outdated nature of fur farming, stating it serves as a catalyst for dangerous infectious diseases.

Alongside these concerns, experts are also sounding alarms about the bushmeat trade, which, while primarily focused on local markets in West and Central Africa, has implications at an international level. Dr. Ben Garrod, a Professor of Evolutionary Biology, pointed to the illegal transportation of endangered species and animal products across borders, warning that these practices could lead to further epidemics.

The problems associated with 'wet markets' and high-density farms continue to fuel concerns regarding zoonotic diseases, which are transmitted from animals to humans. Experts warn that these markets create conditions conducive to disease development, enhancing the risk of transmission due to the close quarters and stress placed on the animals.

In light of the recent reverse zoonosis case, a spokesperson for the Animal and Plant Health Authority reassured the public, indicating that while the risk to human health remains low, it is vital to maintain rigorous surveillance of viruses that can transfer between humans and animals. The authority emphasised ongoing collaborations with farmers and health officials to monitor and manage risks associated with zoonotic diseases.

The situation underscores the complex interplay between animal welfare and human health, highlighting the ongoing dialogue regarding the necessity for reform in industries deemed high-risk for public health.

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

## References

* <https://www.humaneworld.org/en/news/leading-virologists-warn-fur-farms-risk-next-pandemic-avian-flu-outbreaks-finnish-fur-farms-0> - Corroborates warnings from health experts about the risks of fur farms contributing to future pandemics due to the potential for zoonotic disease transmission.
* <https://earth.org/poorly-regulated-animal-industries-pose-active-next-pandemic-threat/> - Supports concerns that poorly regulated animal industries, including fur farms and wildlife markets, pose serious threats for future pandemics due to zoonotic diseases.
* <https://www.humaneworld.org/en/blog/next-global-pandemic-could-begin-factory-farm-hsi-report> - Highlights the risks associated with factory farming and its role in creating conditions conducive to the emergence of zoonotic diseases and future pandemics.
* <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-and-a/detail/q-and-a-on-avian-influenza> - Provides information on avian influenza, a zoonotic disease that can spread between humans and animals, similar to the case of human flu in pigs mentioned in the article.
* <https://www.cdc.gov/zoonotic/reverse-zoonosis.html> - Explains reverse zoonosis, the transmission of diseases from humans to animals, such as the case of human influenza identified in a pig in Northern Ireland.
* <https://www.oie.int/en/animal-health-in-the-world/zoonoses-and-animal-diseases/> - Discusses zoonotic diseases and their transmission between animals and humans, underscoring the importance of monitoring and managing risks in high-density farms and markets.