# Health experts warn of zoonotic disease risks from animal farms and fur trade



Recent findings have raised alarm among health experts regarding the conditions in animal farms and markets that could foster the emergence of deadly viruses capable of spilling over into human populations. Concerns centre around the fur trade, illegal wildlife trade, and unsanitary wet markets, described by specialists as ticking time bombs for potential zoonotic diseases.

The UK has recently documented its first known instance of reverse zoonosis, where human influenza was detected in a pig on a factory farm in Northern Ireland. This information was uncovered in government surveillance data and has ignited discussions about the implications of zoonotic and reverse zoonotic diseases. Notably, concurrent cases of swine flu were reported on the same farm. Dale Vince, founder of the Green Britain Foundation, expressed his concerns, emphasising the urgency to reconsider human-animal interactions and food systems: "How long will we wait before these preventable diseases trigger another pandemic?"

Experts warn about the implications of factory farming, where animals are kept in high-density conditions that could lead to increased disease transmission among livestock. Dr Ben Garrod, a Professor of Evolutionary Biology at the University of East Anglia, has voiced that such environments provide ideal conditions for diseases to develop and mutate, especially when multiple species of animals are mixed together under stressful and unsanitary conditions. He described this interplay as a biological time bomb.

The extensive fur trade is under scrutiny as health officials push for a ban on fur exports. Dr Hope Ferdowsian from the University of New Mexico has joined calls for legislative action to prevent future pandemics, while Dr Jakob Zinsstag from the University of Basel echoed the sentiment, noting the significant risks posed by fur farming in creating conditions ripe for zoonotic disease emergence.

A recent study of fur-bearing animals in China identified 39 viruses considered potentially high-risk for human transmission. Additionally, a significant number of COVID outbreaks were reported across mink farms in Europe and North America, pointing out the urgent need for reforms. The UK, despite having closed its last fur farm in 2003, continues to import fur goods worth over €900 million.

Claire Bass, Senior Director at Humane World for Animals UK, reinforced the risks associated with fur farms, deeming them outmoded and dangerous. The debate over a parliamentary Bill aiming to prohibit the import and sale of fur is ongoing, potentially positioning the UK as a leader in wildlife health protection.

Moreover, the bushmeat trade, while prevalent in West and Central Africa, has international dimensions as it caters to expatriate communities in major cities. Experts warn of the implications this trade may have on wildlife and the risk of new zoonotic diseases. Dr Garrod highlighted the inadequacies in monitoring international wildlife transport, equating such negligence to a threat greater than terrorism or natural disasters.

The concerns extend to markets in various regions across the globe, where illegal animal trade flourishes under unsanitary conditions. Instances in countries such as Peru and Indonesia have been described as notable examples of how infected or distressed animals can, and do, contribute to potential health crises. Investigations have documented widespread illegal animal trade, highlighting troubling conditions that leave numerous species vulnerable to disease transmission.

In response to the findings surrounding reverse zoonosis, a spokesperson for the Animal and Plant Health Authority assured the public that the risk to human health remains low. They emphasised the importance of surveillance measures in place to monitor viruses that can bridge between animals and humans.

As experts continue to raise concerns regarding the interactions between animal welfare and public health, the momentum for policy reform in the fur trade and other high-risk industries gains traction, highlighting the interconnectedness of animal health, food systems, and the potential risks posed to human populations.

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

## References

* <https://animal.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/Animal-Markets-and-Zoonotic-Disease-Risk-high-resolution.pdf> - This report supports the notion that animal markets, including those with unsanitary conditions, are high-risk areas for zoonotic disease transmission due to the aggregation of diverse species and poor hygiene.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9189808/> - This article discusses the role of live and wet markets in the emergence of zoonotic diseases, highlighting the risks associated with unsanitary conditions and mixed species interactions.
* <https://foodtank.com/news/2023/11/harvard-and-nyu-report-reveals-risk-for-zoonotic-disease-in-u-s-animal-markets/> - The report emphasizes regulatory gaps in animal markets that contribute to zoonotic disease risks, echoing concerns about unsanitary conditions and mixed animal environments.
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/animal-and-plant-health-agency-apha> - This UK government resource outlines measures for monitoring animal health, which is crucial for detecting reverse zoonosis and other zoonotic diseases.
* <https://www.humaneleague.org.uk/news/calls-for-fur-import-ban-grow-stronger-as-uk-imports-surge> - This article supports the calls for legislative action against the fur trade, highlighting its potential risks for zoonotic diseases and advocating for a ban on fur imports.
* <https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/zoonotic-diseases.html> - The CDC's information on zoonotic diseases underscores the importance of understanding animal-human interactions in the context of disease transmission and public health risks.
* <https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/health/first-uk-case-reverse-zoonosis-10086097> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/worlds-worst-pandemic-breeding-grounds-35007824> - Please view link - unable to able to access data