

Document Title: BIOSECURITY: GUIDANCE TO STAFF WHO VISIT FARMS

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Target Audience: FOD inspectors and other visiting staff.

Brief Summary

This guidance provides information on biosecurity measures to be followed by FOD staff who visit farms in the absence of, or during, an outbreak of a notifiable animal or plant disease.

Purpose

1. To provide advice to inspectors and other staff who visit farm premises of the biosecurity measures they should follow to avoid the spread of a notifiable animal or plant disease.

Action

2. FOD inspectors and other staff who visit or access farm premises during the course of their work should follow the biosecurity measures set out below.

Background

3. The Department for Environment, Food and Regulatory Affairs (DEFRA) has issued guidance on biosecurity for officials and others who visit farm premises. It deals with the precautions to be taken when entering or leaving any premises with farm animals in the absence of an outbreak of exotic notifiable disease; after confirmation of an outbreak of exotic notifiable disease; and to premises under specific animal disease restrictions. Defra emphasise the over-arching message is simple:

- a. disease may not always be apparent, especially in its early stages;
- b. be clean, particularly if handling animals or moving between different premises.

4. HSE has adopted the DEFRA guidance as the basis for biosecurity measures to be followed by Field Operations Directorate (FOD) staff that inspect or visit farms during the course of their work.

5. Staff in other HSE directorates who require access to or across farm land in discharging their statutory functions will need to consider the extent to which they need to comply with DEFRA's guidelines. The DEFRA code is not mandatory and it is accepted that there may be circumstances where compliance is not possible. Nevertheless the standards within the code represent and will inevitably be seen as 'best practice'. Failure to follow these standards or measures in the event of an outbreak is likely to expose HSE to reputational risks.

6. 'Biosecurity' means a series of measures and protocols designed to prevent potentially harmful biological agents (horticultural, animal or zoonoses) from entering or leaving a property. The measures include:

- a. the cleaning and disinfection of clothing, equipment and vehicles etc;
- b. working protocols designed to minimise movements, contact and therefore potential contamination of all people, vehicles and equipment used.

Biosecurity measures

7. FOD staff who visit or access farm premises during the course of their work and who fail to carry out appropriate biosecurity measures on entering and leaving the farm run the risk of spreading plant or animal diseases to and from other farms. It is important that appropriate measures are taken whether or not any disease outbreaks have been reported, and even when for example animals have been removed from premises (disease-causing agents and their vectors can persist for some time). Some diseases are zoonotic (transmissible between animals and man). The adoption of biosecurity measures is therefore invariably consistent with good public health and occupational health considerations.

8. 'Appropriate' biosecurity measures depend on the risk (of spreading disease) associated with the visit. Factors that determine the level of risk include:

- a. The type of farm – e.g. arable, livestock, mixed, horticultural;
- b. Any restrictions applying to the farm – e.g. animal disease or plant health controls;
- c. Any restrictions applying to the area - e.g. Restricted Infected Area or Infected Area;
- d. The extent and reason for the visit - e.g. to the farmhouse to examine records, on-farm inspection of premises and equipment, on-farm inspection requiring close or direct contact with livestock, land inspection, etc.

9. The measures set out in paras. 10-12 are supplemented by the following appendices, which give additional information on the precautions to be followed by FOD staff when visiting particular types of farm premises:

Appendix 1 - Arable farms;

Appendix 2 - Livestock farms in the absence of an outbreak of a notifiable disease;

Appendix 3 - Livestock farms following confirmation of an outbreak of a notifiable disease;

Appendix 4 - Premises under specific animal disease restrictions.

10. The precautions detailed in Appendices 1 to 4 are based on the assumption that FOD inspectors and other visiting staff should not normally:

- a. Come into close or direct contact with notifiable disease susceptible livestock (e.g. cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, camels, farmed deer, poultry etc);
- b. Enter an arable crop other than by a public right of way.

11. Suitable and sufficient supplies of disinfectant, equipment for its use and appropriate PPE/RPE will be issued to inspectors and should be kept readily available for use when visiting farm premises.

12. Biosecurity measures to be followed by FOD visiting staff include:

- a. Where appropriate and practicable, farm visits should be made following prior contact with the owner/farm manager. The opportunity should be taken to check what biosecurity arrangements (if any) are in place, whether you may use them and the arrangements for parking;
- b. Wherever possible, vehicles should be parked off farm. If there is no alternative, vehicles taken on to a farm premises should be parked, where possible, on hard standing away from livestock. Vehicles should not normally be taken into areas to which livestock have access. Vehicles taken onto farm should be visibly free of animal excreta, slurry etc;
- c. Before leaving the farm all visible contamination e.g. manure, slurry or similar material should be cleaned from the outside of the vehicle which should be disinfected using on-farm facilities. If this is not possible, vehicles should be cleaned before being taken onto another farm with livestock, either before the next visit or, if appropriate, at the end of the working day;
- d. Suitable protective clothing should be worn on all farm visits. The purpose of protective clothing is to prevent any contamination being

carried from farm to farm. The type of protective clothing and footwear required depends on the nature of the visit. For example, where the only likely contamination is to footwear, then protective clothing (other than footwear) may not be required. Examples of types of protective clothing include:

- e. Disposable overalls (with head coverage of CE type 5 & 6 that offer protection against dusts, splashes). These should only be used once and then disposed of at the end of the visit. With the farmer's permission they can be left on the premises or be bagged and disposed of on return to the office (e.g. arrangements exist for HSL to collect used overalls and other disposable PPE/RPE from field offices for disposal);
- f. If non-disposable overalls (e.g. cotton boiler type suits) are used they should not be used again until laundered;
- g. Disposable gloves;
- h. Appropriate footwear (e.g. wellington boots) and waterproof clothing. These must be cleaned and disinfected before entering the farm and again, where possible, at the end of the visit;
- i. Close fitting goggles or other equipment that gives at least the same level of protection;
- j. RPE will be necessary in certain circumstances, e.g. visits which require entry to buildings which contain poultry or their faecal matter. For simplicity, only FFP3 respirators will be issued. Disposable respirators should only be used once and then disposed of at the end of the visit. With the farmer's permission they can be left on the premises or be bagged and disposed of on return to the office. If non-disposable respirators have been used, then they should be treated as contaminated and be thoroughly cleaned before maintenance or storage - inspectors should closely follow the manufacturer's instructions and recommendations for maintenance, cleaning and disinfection of used non-disposable RPE;
- k. All other equipment taken on the farm should be cleaned before arrival and on departure. Where possible equipment should be protected from contamination e.g. using plastic bags. Where equipment can be cleansed and disinfected this must be done before entry to the premises and again on departure.

Contact

13. Chris Molde, Agriculture and Food Sector, Nottingham (513 2886).

Further Information

14. The Agriculture & Food Sector will keep these biosecurity arrangements under review. It will also monitor and advise operational Band 1's/2's of any additional central guidance on animal disease control measures issued by DEFRA's Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) in respect of farm visits.

15. If a notifiable disease has been confirmed by the CVO and a restricted area or control zone has been declared, the status and extent of the area should be checked on the DEFRA website (www.defra.gov.uk). The status of an individual farm or premise within any control zone can also be checked on the DEFRA website (via a postcode search tool).

16. When restrictions are removed by DEFRA, visits to premises can be resumed provided appropriate biosecurity measures are taken as detailed above and in Appendix 1 and 2.

17. Guidance on the transport, storage and safe use of disinfectant (including equipment, procedures and first aid) are detailed in Appendix 5.

Feedback

18. Standard text and generic email address to be inserted by ROG team/CDS.

APPENDIX 1

VISITS TO ARABLE FARMS

Introduction

1. 'Arable farm' means:
 - a. Farm premises that have been free of animals which are susceptible to notifiable disease (e.g. cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, camels, farmed deer, poultry etc) for the four weeks preceding the visit. This includes any of the above animals which are kept as pets.
 - b. Farm premises that do not intend introducing susceptible animals in the four week period following the visit.
 - c. Parts of the farm to be visited that have not been treated with manure or other products from susceptible animals during the four weeks preceding the visit.

Risk Assessment

2. The risk is to plant health. There are many plant pests and diseases, which could cause serious damage to crops and plants. Official controls and restrictions on

the import, movement and keeping of plants, plant pests and other material e.g. soil are vital to help prevent the introduction and spread of harmful organisms.

3. Soil inhabiting fungi and nematodes can be spread by small insects, mites and soil carried on footwear, clothing, vehicles etc. Visits to arable farms are deemed to be low risk. However, even where the risk is negligible farmers may perceive a risk from inspectors or other staff who may have visited other farms. FOD staff should be sensitive to that perception, be seen to be taking the additional precautions detailed below and comply with any reasonable requests from a farmer for additional measures. Plant hygiene precautions may determine the sequence of visits.

4. If a serious plant disease or pest is confirmed as present, quarantine measures which include a range of restrictions are likely to be in place. Inspectors and visiting staff should comply with any notices that refer to quarantine soil-borne pests or diseases.

5. Further advice in relation to specific plant health situations can be obtained from the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate (PHSI) for the area in question. Details of PHSI regional offices can be obtained from the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) on tel. 01904 465625 or their website at www.fera.defra.gov.uk/contactUs/contactPlh.cfm

Additional biosecurity measures

6. In addition to the general biosecurity measures listed earlier in this guidance, FOD staff should:

- a. As a minimum, wear suitable footwear which should be cleaned immediately before and after the visit with soapy water;
- b. If the presence of a quarantine soil-borne pest or if disease is suspected, footwear should be disinfected with an acid-based disinfectant (2% solution) for ten minutes before rinsing off. FOD staff should check that the disinfectant they have been issued with is sufficient for this purpose – see Appendix 5;
- c. Wherever possible avoid entering arable crops. Keep to headlands and/or public footpaths. If you have to enter an arable crop, wear a disposable overall and dispose of it after use either on farm or back at the office;

Avoid crossing any yards, lanes, collection areas or fields that are or have been used by notifiable disease susceptible animals in the previous four weeks.

APPENDIX 2

VISITS TO LIVESTOCK FARMS IN THE ABSENCE OF AN OUTBREAK OF A NOTIFIABLE ANIMAL DISEASE

Introduction

1. 'Livestock farm' means premises where:
 - a. Notifiable disease susceptible livestock are present as a commercial concern or kept as pets;
 - b. Such animals were present in the four weeks preceding the visit or will be introduced in the next four weeks;
 - c. The parts of the farm to be visited have been treated with manure or other products from susceptible animals in the preceding four weeks.

Risk Assessment

2. The risk of spreading disease varies with the degree of exposure to animals and their products; hence the measures required should take into account the nature of the visit.
3. However, FOD does not expect or anticipate that inspectors will normally come into close or direct contact with livestock. Unnecessary contact with animals should be avoided and visiting staff should neither handle animals nor routinely go into livestock enclosures or other buildings (e.g. poultry sheds) unless it is absolutely necessary for the purpose of their visit.
4. Suitable protective clothing should be worn at all farm visits that involve entering areas where livestock are present or to which they normally have access. The type of PPE/RPE required depends on the nature the visit, e.g. the protection required for a visit to a poultry farm or a dairy herd would differ from that required for a visit to an extensive unit on moorland.

Additional biosecurity measures

5. In addition to the general biosecurity measures listed earlier in this guidance, FOD staff should:
 - a. Take sufficient water, disinfectant and disinfecting equipment on the visit, even if facilities for disinfecting clothes, footwear, equipment or vehicles are thought to be available on the premises;

- b. As a minimum, wear suitable waterproof footwear (e.g. wellington boots), which should be cleaned immediately before and after the visit with disinfectant;
- c. If the visit includes areas where there are livestock, standard issue disposable overalls should be used. These must only be used once and then be properly disposed of at either the farm, or be bagged and disposed of on return to the office (see para 10(j) for further details);
- d. If, in exceptional cases, an inspector anticipates it is likely they will come into close or direct contact with susceptible animals then standard issue waterproof protective clothing should be worn. This should be cleaned and disinfected before entering and, where possible, leaving the farm;
- e. If it is necessary to enter a building that requires RPE (e.g. it contains poultry or their faecal material) then RPE respirators (FFP3) should also be used. Disposable respirators must only be used once and then be properly disposed of at either the farm, or be bagged and disposed of on return to the office. Non-disposable respirators should be cleaned before their next use (see para 10(e) for further details).

VISITS TO LIVESTOCK FARMS FOLLOWING CONFIRMATION OF AN OUTBREAK OF A NOTIFIABLE DISEASE

Introduction

1. In the event of a confirmed disease outbreak, DEFRA's Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) will announce a range of restrictions or measures that may affect surrounding farms. These are likely to include the establishment of a range of control zones or areas.
2. A 'control zone' or 'control area' means an infected area, risk area, protection zone, surveillance zone, restricted zone, temporary movement restriction zone, temporary control zone, etc.
3. Only **essential** visits should take place to farms located within the above areas/zones which have animals that are susceptible to the confirmed disease. See Appendix 4 if the visit relates to a farm which is under specific restrictions.
4. Non-essential visits to farms with susceptible animals within a control zone/area should be immediately suspended.
5. Where a visit to a farm in an area/zone where restrictions have been imposed is deemed essential (e.g. to investigate a fatal or serious accident, a known or suspected serious case of zoonotic infection or to investigate a serious complaint which cannot be investigated by other means, etc.) then FOD staff should follow the additional biosecurity measures detailed below.
6. Visits to farms with livestock that are not susceptible to the confirmed disease (e.g. a visit to a dairy farm that is within an avian influenza restricted zone) can continue as normal. FOD staff should follow the guidance in Appendix 2.

Risk Assessment

7. Current information on the country's animal disease status along with the status, extent and restrictions in places within a local control zone can be obtained from the relevant Animal Health Regional Office or from the DEFRA website (www.defra.gov.uk).

Additional biosecurity measures

8. In addition to the general biosecurity measures listed earlier in this guidance, FOD staff should:
 - a. Follow the additional measures detailed in Appendix 2;
 - b. As a minimum, wear disposable overalls and waterproof boots at all farm premises with susceptible animals.

VISITS TO PREMISES UNDER SPECIFIC RESTRICTIONS

Introduction

1. Inspectors should not normally visit any farm premises subject to specific animal health disease restrictions.
2. Where a visit to farm premises on which animals have been or are about to be slaughtered for disease control reasons is unavoidable (e.g. to investigate a fatal or major accident, etc), such visits can only be made with the permission of Animal Health's Regional Field Manager (RFM) (in England, or the Divisional Veterinary Manager (DVM) in Scotland and Wales) who will issue a licence where necessary.
3. RFM/DVMs will only normally authorise visits providing appropriate biosecurity measures are taken **and** after preliminary cleaning and disinfection of the premises has taken place. In exceptional circumstances, such as a fatal accident, inspectors may require access to farm premises before preliminary cleaning and disinfection has been completed. Again, such visits can only be made with the permission of the RFM/DVM, under the authority of a licence.
4. The RFM/DVM may require the inspector to be accompanied by an officer from the Animal Health Regional Office, to comply with the conditions in the schedule to the restrictions and/or to comply with any additional requirements of the licence. Inspectors should follow the precautions set out below and particularly note the need to observe relevant 'quarantine' periods.

Risk Assessment

5. Current information on the status of an individual farm, or the extent and restrictions in places within a local control zone can be obtained from the relevant Animal Health Regional Office or from the DEFRA website (www.defra.gov.uk).
6. Veterinary risk assessments for some diseases have been published and are also available on the DEFRA website. The Sector will monitor DEFRA's website and inform operational Band 1s/2s of relevant information.

Additional biosecurity measures

7. In addition to the general biosecurity measures listed earlier in this guidance, FOD staff should:
 - a. Follow the additional measures detailed in Appendix 2;
 - b. Visit only with the permission of the RFM/DVM who will issue a licence where necessary;
 - c. In the absence of a specific instruction in any licence issued by the RFM/DVM, inspectors should wear waterproof protective clothing and waterproof boots at all times;
 - d. If the RFM/DVM licences a visit to a restricted premises before preliminary cleaning and disinfection has taken place, the following condition **must** be observed:

- i. After a visit to such premises a specified 'quarantine' period must elapse before the inspector can either visit another farm which has susceptible animals or have contact with such animals while outside of work (e.g. the period for Foot and Mouth Disease is 72 hours). For example, the inspector should not keep or tend to susceptible animals (they may live on a farm or keep susceptible species such as chickens) and should not walk their dog across fields containing susceptible species. If the inspector cannot adhere to such quarantine conditions outside of work, then they should not visit farms where quarantine restrictions apply;
- ii. Any additional measures required by the RFM/DVM's licence.

APPENDIX 5

DISINFECTION EQUIPMENT AND PROCEDURES

Equipment

1. Inspectors and visiting staff will be supplied on personal issue with the following:
 - a. An approved disinfectant;
 - b. Transportable, sealable water containers (10 litre capacity);
 - c. Leak-proof plastic bucket or container in which to mix the solution;
 - d. Hand-held brush and synthetic sponge;
 - e. Disposable gloves or rubber 'washing up' type gloves;
 - f. Eye protection to prevent eyes being splashed with disinfectant concentrate;
 - g. Plastic bags to contain items;
 - h. A large container / box to carry items;
 - i. A labelled rigid, crush-proof container (e.g. 'Tupperware' style box) for storing disinfectant sachets/tablets, if appropriate;
 - j. Liquid soap/detergent.
2. The disinfectant supplied to inspectors will be a suitable product as detailed on DEFRA's list of approved disinfectants (<http://disinfectants.defra.gov.uk/>).

Safe storage/transportation of disinfectants

3. Concentrated disinfectants should be handled and stored in accordance with manufacturer's instruction. Generally this means in leak proof containers in a cool dry place away from direct sunlight and segregated from other substances.
4. Only sufficient disinfectant for the day's work should be carried.
5. Liquid concentrates (if supplied) should be transported in robust containers with tightly fitting leak proof lids, and be correctly labelled. The container should have its top securely screwed on and be placed in a plastic bucket or similar to safeguard against spillage whilst in the vehicle.
6. Disinfectant sachets or tablets (if supplied) should be carried in a rigid, correctly labelled, tightly closed crush-proof container.
7. Ensure that disinfectant is stored safely and is not accessible to children etc.

Safe use of disinfectant – mixing and use

8. When mixing disinfectants, inspectors should:
 - a. Take approximately 20 litres of water, in two containers where possible to avoid the risk of injury when lifting. Make sure a suitable supply of clean water is also readily available in case of emergency (e.g. to wash skin or rinse eyes);
 - b. Read the instructions on the packet and take note of safety information;
 - c. Mix the disinfectant according to the manufacturers instructions. Where there is more than one recommended concentration, the stronger concentration should be used;
 - d. Avoid contact with eyes and skin;
 - e. Wear eye protection and gloves when handling concentrated disinfectant;
 - f. When using powder concentrate supplied in soluble sachets, immerse the sachet under water to avoid inhalation of the dust;
 - g. Add the concentrated product to the water and mix thoroughly. Warm (not exceeding 40⁰ C) but not hot, water can be used with most disinfectants but this should be checked before use;
 - h. Do not mix the disinfectant with other chemicals;
 - i. Keep the product away from children;
 - j. One mix of disinfectant solution can be used twice (e.g. before and after a visit), but will need to be covered and labelled appropriately if left

unattended. It should be left in a secure place so that it is not accessible to children or animals.

9. When using disinfectants, inspectors should:
- a. Wash off all mud, slurry and other organic matter with soapy water before applying disinfectant;
 - b. Disinfect boots and waterproof clothing (if used) BEFORE and AFTER each farm visit;
 - c. A sponge can be effective for applying disinfectant to protective clothing. When using brushes, brush away from the face/eyes;
 - d. The used disinfectant solution should be disposed of according to manufacturer's instructions (e.g. in the case of Virkon S (1% solution) small quantities of diluted solution may be disposed of in waste water systems or on grassy land away from any watercourse. If the farm owner objects to disposal on his land then the inspector will have to return the solution to the water container and dispose of it at a suitable location off site);
 - e. Equipment should then be stored safely in suitable sealed storage boxes or plastic bags;
 - f. Wash hands with soap and water at the end of the disinfection procedure;
 - g. During the visit, Inspectors should seek to refill the water containers for use next time. Additional supplies of water should be carried if for any reason it is anticipated that this will not be possible.

First aid measures

10. In the case of skin contact, wash immediately with soap and plenty of water. Seek medical advice if irritation persists.
11. In case of contact with eyes, including any splashes, rinse immediately with plenty of water and seek medical advice.
12. There is a risk that frequent skin contact with certain disinfectants could lead to contact dermatitis. The higher strength concentrations used for disinfecting boots etc. should not be allowed to come into contact with skin and must not be used for hand washing. Liquid soap should normally be used for hand washing purposes and dilute disinfectant solution should not be used unless specifically indicated that it is safe to do so.
13. If skin irritation or any other symptoms appear after using the disinfectant then do not use it again and seek medical advice from a doctor. You should also report the problem to your line manager using form IH1. Further information is available on the Intranet (<http://intranet/yourhealthsafety/index.htm>).

