

Risks

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Animal disease



Threat assessment: The occurrence of a large-scale animal disease outbreak in Estonia is considered likely. Compared with the previous assessment, the probability of such an event has increased from unlikely to likely.

The years 2023 and 2024 were stable in terms of the occurrence of animal diseases. No particularly dangerous animal diseases were detected in kept animals, and there were no changes in the statuses of animal diseases subject to official eradication programmes.

The particularly dangerous animal diseases affecting terrestrial animals include Newcastle disease, cattle plague (rinderpest), foot-and-mouth disease, African horse sickness, highly pathogenic avian influenza, sheep and goat pox, lumpy skin disease, Rift Valley fever, African swine fever, classical swine fever, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, contagious caprine pleuropneumonia, ovine rinderpest, and glanders. For aquatic animals, five diseases are classified as particularly dangerous, of which in Estonian conditions the most significant is epizootic haematopoietic necrosis, which threatens rainbow trout and perch.

THREATS

- ✓ Particularly dangerous animal diseases may also be transmissible to humans, causing illness or even death. Veterinarians and people working in outbreak sites are especially at risk if they do not use personal protective equipment in a timely or sufficient manner.
- ✓ Although inspections in animal husbandry facilities show a decrease in the number of detected violations, at the same time the practice of free-range keeping of animals and birds is increasing, as is people's unrestricted movement between animal and poultry farms. This creates favourable conditions for the spread of infections from one farm to another. In addition, animal diseases are spreading in Europe that had either not occurred before or had not been seen for decades.
- ✓ African swine fever (ASF) remains endemic in Estonia. In recent years, the wild boar population has been increasing. While in 2018 the winter population was just over 5,000 wild boar, by 2024 it had risen to nearly 17,000 individuals. The most recent outbreaks in domestic pigs occurred in July 2023 in two farms in southern Estonia. ASF has also been diagnosed in Estonia's neighbouring and nearby countries: Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the Russian Federation. In 2024, 21 European countries reported ASF outbreaks.

- ✓ Compared with several previous years, the number of highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreaks has risen in Europe, including in the Nordic countries, meaning that the risk of the disease spreading from wild birds to domestic poultry is significantly higher. Detection of avian influenza viruses in mammals is also on the rise.

ACTIONS

- ✓ As part of national animal disease programmes, herds in Estonia are examined annually for more than 36 animal diseases to determine their presence or absence. In addition, planned official inspections of livestock holdings are carried out on a risk basis to monitor their general compliance with established requirements.
- ✓ In April 2025, the Estonian Agriculture and Food Board commissioned two expert opinions from the National Centre for Laboratory Research and Risk Assessment. These opinions concluded that the risk of introducing foot-and-mouth disease into Estonia is not high.
- ✓ The Agriculture and Food Board considers it extremely important and necessary to raise awareness among both animal keepers and the wider public.

GUIDELINES

Everyone can contribute to preventing the spread of animal diseases:

- ✓ Do not bring animal products from abroad that may be contaminated with pathogens.
- ✓ Avoid, where possible, contact with farm animals and wild animals. If you visit a farm, wait at least 48 hours before going to another farm.
- ✓ Vaccinate your pets against rabies and do not bring unvaccinated pets into the country.

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