

Q&A FOR DETECTION OF H1N1 VIRUS IN PIGS IMPORTED FROM PULAU BULAN

1. Can I catch H1N1 from eating pork and pork products?

No, you can't. World health authorities, i.e. the World Health Organisation (WHO), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO), have jointly stated that there is no evidence that the H1N1 virus is transmitted by food. Pork and pork products, handled in accordance with good hygienic practices to prevent contamination during processing, will not be a source of infection. It is safe to eat processed pork products, such as ham, bacon, sausages and canned pork. Cooking pork to an internal temperature of 70°C kills bacteria and viruses, including the H1N1 virus.

2. Is it safe to handle pork?

It is safe to handle pork. Generally, people should continue to adopt good hygiene practices when handling pork.

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3. If pork is safe, why is there a need to inform the public?

H1N1 is a topic of public interest. Whenever consumers perceive that there are issues with food safety, there is always heightened uncertainty and fear as consumers are worried over the potential impact on their health.

This is why it is important that we inform the public of the facts and assure them that pork from the Pulau Bulan pigs is safe for consumption.

4. Can we catch the virus from pigs?

In Singapore, there is no contact between the public and pigs. As for workers in the abattoir, they have been putting on personal protective equipments whenever working since April 2009.

5. What is the purpose of AVA testing for the H1N1 virus?

AVA started collecting samples from pigs to test for the H1N1 virus since the outbreak of the disease in humans in Apr 09. The purpose is to provide an early alert for the emergence of the disease on the farm so that timely risk management measures can be put in place.

6. Is this the same virus as the H1N1 virus affecting humans?

This is the same virus which is affecting humans.

7. What action will AVA take for those pigs at the Pulau Bulan farm that tested positive for H1N1 virus?

AVA will be participating in a comprehensive disease surveillance programme on the farm which will be led by the Indonesian veterinary authorities, the Directorate-General of Livestock Services (DGLS), to identify and isolate affected pig houses. Restricted animal movement will be imposed to ensure only healthy pigs are exported to Singapore. This is in line with the World Organisation for Animal Health's (OIE) recommendation that movement restrictions be applied until the pigs have recovered. The Australian and Canadian Veterinary Authorities have also adopted similar approaches when H1N1 infection was detected on their pig farms.

8. What measures have AVA taken to ensure that only healthy pigs from Pulau Bulan are imported into Singapore?

Since April 2009, AVA has put in place an early warning system for the emergence of the disease in live pigs. These include measures such as additional farm inspections, enhanced inspection at the abattoir as well as sampling and testing for H1N1 prior to export and upon arrival. The Pulau Bulan farm has also implemented bio-security measures against the H1N1 virus such as temperature taking and restriction of visitors at the farm.

Upon detection of H1N1 through our surveillance programme, AVA has put in place enhanced measures. These include weekly farm inspections and increased pre-export testing.

9. What if there is not enough supply of pigs from Pulau Bulan?

Singapore has diversified our sources of supply over the years. Pigs from Pulau Bulan only constitute about 21% of our supply. We currently have 25 approved countries exporting pork and pork products. Major sources of frozen and chilled pork include Australia and Brazil. Any shortfall in supply can be met by increased import of pork from these sources.

10. What measures are taken to protect the abattoir workers who come into close contact with the pigs?

Abattoir workers are required to put on personal protective equipment like face masks, face shields, gloves and aprons.

11. Has H1N1 been detected in pigs elsewhere?

Yes, H1N1 has been detected in pigs in Canada and Australia. The Australian and Canadian Veterinary Authorities adopted recommendations by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) on the application of movement restrictions until the pigs have recovered when H1N1 infection was detected on their pig farms.