China culls thousands of pigs as African swine fever spreads

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More than 14,500 pigs have been culled in an eastern Chinese city, officials said Wednesday, as the world's largest pork producer scrambles

to contain an outbreak of African swine fever.

Beijing reported its first case of the disease in early August, and since then the virus has spread to pigs in several cities across China, requiring authorities to destroy large numbers of hogs.

African swine fever is not harmful to humans but causes haemorrhagic fever in domesticated pigs and wild boar that almost always ends in death within a few days.

There is no antidote or vaccine, and the only known method to prevent the disease from spreading is a mass cull of the infected livestock.

The government of the port city of Lianyungang, about 500km (300 miles) north of Shanghai, said it had culled the swine by Monday night in a quarantined area.

Authorities said they had inspected four million other pigs in the city and found no other abnormalities.

In a report to the World Organisation for Animal Health, Beijing said an emergency plan had been launched and control measures taken to halt the spread of the disease.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) warned in May of the risk of the spread of African swine fever from Russia.

Around half of the world's pigs are raised in China, and the Chinese are the biggest consumers of pork per capita, according to the FAO.

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