

Quarter of all pigs worldwide could die from swine fever, animal health organization says

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At least a quarter of the world's pig population could die as a mass outbreak of African swine fever spreads, a global animal health organization says.

The die-off would spark global pig shortages, spiking prices of pork and products that rely on the animals to be produced, said Mark Schipp, president of the World Organization for Animal Health.

"I don't think the species will be lost, but it's the biggest threat to the commercial raising of pigs we've ever seen," Schipp told reporters Thursday in Sydney. "And it's the biggest threat to any commercial livestock of our generation."

African swine fever is a [viral disease](#) that can spread rapidly through pig herds, according to the Center for Food Security and Public Health at Iowa State University. The disease, though, poses no threat of infection to humans.

The virus spreads through direct contact with infected animals, living or dead, or objects that have touched infected [animals](#), and it has no approved vaccines, the World Organization for Animal Health says.

Within the past year, the disease has rocked China, which is home to half of the world's pig population, Schipp said, fueling the global crisis and hurting the Chinese pig market.

Africa and some areas in Europe, South America and the Caribbean have historically seen most of the outbreaks, but the disease has spread in recent years across countries in Asia and Europe, too, according to World Organization for Animal Health.

According to Reuters, the disease has killed hundreds of million [pigs](#) in 50 countries.

"The risk exists for all countries, whether they are geographically close or geographically distant because there is a multitude of potential sources of contamination," World Organisation for Animal Health

Director General Monique Eloit told the news agency.

Schipp also noted the concern of quality control, especially in products with skins for sausages, salamis and similar foods.

"Those casing products move through multiple countries," he said.

"They're cleaned in one, graded in another, sorted in another, partially treated in another, and finally treated in a fourth of fifth country.

They've very hard to trace, through so many countries."

The blood thinner heparin, made from pig products and largely sourced from China, could also face shortages, Schipp said.

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