

# NPA BRIEFING



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## NPA briefing note on miniature and pet pigs

### Issue:

Keeping pigs and micro pigs as pets has become a fashion trend, but frequently owners are not fully aware of the welfare, disease and legal implications of keeping these animals.

### Background:

- Micro pigs are not a distinct breed; there are more than twenty breeds of miniature pig across the world (e.g. Gottingen, Sinclair, Minnesota, Wuzhishan, Yucatan).
- Many of the miniature pig breeds were developed for medical research to study xenotransplantation (organ transplants), Huntingdon Disease, malignant melanoma (skin cancer), achondroplasia (dwarfism).
- As a result, these pigs may carry genetic mutations responsible for deformities linked with dwarfism such as deformed skulls, shortened legs and weak limbs. Obesity is also a common problem in these pigs, often leading to severe locomotor issues.
- Micro pigs are also produced by successive breeding of the smallest pigs (often the runts) from litters of traditional breeds such as the Vietnamese pot belly or Kune Kune. This is usually achieved through inbreeding, which can lead to other genetic weaknesses or susceptibilities.
- Thus, continued breeding of these animals may compromise welfare and should not be encouraged.
- In some cases people have bought “micro pigs” only to find that they are in fact just small pigs which later grow to full size weighing 150-200 kg.
- Pigs generally do not make good house pets because they like to root around their environment and chew, meaning they can be quite destructive. We would advise against pigs living in a house - outdoor accommodation should be provided ensuring that the pig has enough space and suitable secure shelter.
- Apart from the welfare concerns associated with how micro pigs are bred, these animals also pose a disease risk to commercial pig herds.
- The British pig industry invests substantial time and money into reducing and preventing disease, through health improvement programmes and biosecurity practices on farm.
- Pet pigs can catch and spread exactly the same diseases that commercial pigs get, including notifiable diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease and Classical Swine Fever. These viruses are known as ‘notifiable’ diseases because of the legal requirement for pig owners to notify the authorities if their animals are suspected of carrying them.
- The UK pig herd is currently free from notifiable diseases, but if the situation were to change movement restrictions would be placed on all pigs in the area surrounding the infected premises and any affected animals would have to be culled in order to eliminate the disease.

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- Pigs can also transmit disease to humans and vice versa, especially flu, so owners should take appropriate care when handling their pig, e.g. hand-washing.
- Pet pig owners must follow the same legal rules as pig farmers. These include:
  - All** pig owners must have a [County Parish Holding number](#), for the place where the pig will be kept, even if they only have one pig. This must be obtained *before* the pig arrives and can be obtained from the Rural Payments Agency.
  - All** pig owners must obtain a herd health mark by [registering their pigs](#) with the local Animal and Plant Health Agency within 30 days of the pig arriving on the property.
  - When a pig is brought onto the property, **no other pigs** may leave the property for 20 days.
  - Any movement** of a pig from its registered holding (apart from a walk, visit to the vets or non-economic activity) must be [reported](#) in advance.
  - Owners wishing to walk pet pigs on a public street must first obtain a [walking licence](#).
  - Pigs to be moved or walked must first be [tagged, tattooed or marked](#) with identification details.
  - It is **illegal** to [feed any pig](#) with **food waste** (even vegetables) from a household or commercial kitchen. This is classed as swill-feeding which has been banned across the EU since 2002 after an outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease.
  - Failure to comply with these rules can result in a £5000 fine or being banned from keeping animals.

#### NPA position:

- The nature of the way some micro pigs are bred has some severe welfare implications. The NPA urges people to not support irresponsible breeding of micro pigs.
- NPA understands that the vast majority of people that keep pigs do comply with the law, but we are keen to see that any pig keeper who is found breaking the law, jeopardising animal welfare or causing significant disease risks should be prosecuted.
- Pet pigs pose a threat to the health of the commercial pig herd and the livelihoods of pig farmers and as such NPA would encourage all owners to consider and avoid the possibility of disease spread in all activities involving their pet pigs.
- Protecting pig welfare must be a priority for all pig keepers. The veterinary, nutritional, behavioural and environmental needs of pet pigs should be met at all times.

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