# Transmissible animal diseases

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The objective of ensuring a high level of health for humans, animals, and plants is enshrined in the Treaties underpinning the EU. Over the years, the EU has built up a **comprehensive body of law** designed to prevent and manage risks to animal and plant health and the safety of the food chain at EU and national level. The law in these policy areas is enforced by means of a common set of rules on official controls to be carried out by the competent authorities in the EU Member States.

To date, overall, the legal framework which the EU has developed has proven to be effective in preventing and countering risks. However, the modern global market increasingly exposes the EU to new risks and constantly calls for innovation and competitiveness. This, and the experience gained with EU law in this area, point to the **need to simplify and update available instruments and to further integrate the approach across the different areas**. The Commission has conducted a revision of the current legal framework for animal health, plant health, plant reproductive material and official controls aimed mainly at increasing effectiveness, consistency and legal clarity in those areas.

This Communication presents the resulting four legislative proposals in the four areas of **animal health**, plant health, plant reproductive material and official controls (the 'review package') and explains, for each of them, the current context, the rationale behind the package and the main improvements introduced. The package also includes a fifth proposal establishing a multiannual programme for EU financing of actions aimed at ensuring a high level of health for humans, animals and plants along the agri-food chain and in related areas while allowing businesses to operate in an environment that favours competitiveness and job creation.

**Context of animal health in the EU:** currently, EU intervention is focused on preventing and controlling transmissible diseases that may have significant health and economic impacts. The impact of an animal disease outbreak can vary widely, but it usually poses a direct risk to animal and often public health, partly through food of animal origin. However, there can also be indirect negative effects (possibly economic or social), including the cost to farmers and related industries of dealing with disease and of business disruption, the cost to the public sector of eradicating and monitoring the disease, and changes in consumption and international trade patterns.

**Current EU animal health legislative framework: the** EU animal health legislative framework consists of around 50 basic directives and regulations, some of which were adopted in the early 1960s. Since then, a body of over 400 veterinary acts - most of them drawn up between 1988 and 1995 for a Community of only 12 Member States - has been built up. In the meantime, **new challenges** have emerged: new diseases have sprung up, while others (e.g. foot and mouth disease, bluetongue and avian flu) have recently reappeared, reminding us of the serious risks they pose.

**Trading conditions** have also changed radically, with the volume of trade in animal products increasing significantly both within the EU and worldwide.

**Content of the proposed Animal Health Law (AHL):** the purpose of the proposal is (i) to ensure a high level of public health and food safety; (ii) to support farming and the rural economy; to improve economic growth, cohesion and competitiveness; and (iii) to promote farming practices and animal welfare which minimise environmental impacts.

The main driving principles of the revision process in this area are **simplification, modernisation and increased consistency** across the EU's animal health legislation.

The AHL lays down the foundations for a **wide and comprehensive legislative framework** for EU animal health policy. It clearly sets out the overarching principles and objectives necessary to further reduce animal disease while maintaining the EU's economic competitiveness**.** Detailed provisions (such as specific disease control measures, identification and registration rules for certain species, and specific measures on intra-EU movement for particular species) are to be dealt with by means of delegated or implementing acts. Using these acts to introduce more specific rules or requirements would allow decision-makers the **flexibility and speed** needed to react to rapidly changing scenarios and veterinary emergencies.

The proposed **enhancement of disease surveillance, disease notification** and **reporting networks** would better support early detection and control of diseases (including emerging diseases such as those linked to climate change) and ensure greater convergence with international standards.

**Simplification and clarification:** a legislative framework that is simplified and easier to understand would be more user-friendly for authorities and operators and would ensure their actions are more consistent and objective-focused. This has the potential to **reduce the administrative burden** on them by cutting down the time taken to familiarise themselves with the legislation and by introducing scope for simplifying certain administrative requirements and making them more coherent. The new AHL will **clarify the animal health responsibilities** of operators, veterinarians and others, partly by requiring a basic level of knowledge for the first time.

**New technologies:** the AHL will allow more scope for using **new technologies** for animal health activities such as monitoring pathogens, electronic identification and registration of animals and electronic certificates. The use of new technologies and systems will tend to reduce the administrative burden on both veterinary authorities and operators in their work.

**Increased flexibility through the use of a risk-based approach:** criteria for **listing animal diseases,** categorised systematically and on a scientific and evidential basis, will be introduced so that the EU can better prioritise the use of its resources, giving less priority to diseases which pose less risk. The wider use of '**compartmentalisation**' (i.e. where some farms are considered safe even during disease outbreaks), will allow a **more risk-based approach to animal disease control and potentially fewer trade restrictions**.