



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# EXPORT HEALTH CERTIFICATES



Importing animals and animal  
products into Great Britain

KNOW YOUR RISK TO BE READY FOR CHANGE



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# HEALTH CERTIFICATES



## INTRODUCTION

This leaflet provides more information to European Union (EU) & European Free Trade Association (EFTA) exporters and Great Britain (GB)-based importers about one of the key biosecurity controls: the health certificate. These controls also apply to Rest of World (RoW) exporters. Health certificates are a requirement for almost all imports of live animals, germinal products and medium-risk animal products entering Great Britain.



## WHY ARE HEALTH CERTIFICATES NEEDED ?

Imported goods may carry risks that need to be controlled to protect the biosecurity of the United Kingdom. This risk varies across commodities. For permitted imports that require a Health Certificate, the certificate sets out the requirements to mitigate the risk.

Any failure in compliance with biosecurity controls, also referred to as Sanitary and Phytosanitary controls (SPS), could lead to the imported consignment being rejected and destroyed with no compensation, (sometimes the consignment may be returned if the exporting country allows it). Non-compliance includes the absence of a certificate when one is required, or errors within a certificate.

From 31 January 2024, following the introduction of health certificates for medium risk EU/EFTA goods, documentary checks will be undertaken by Defra on some certificates and feedback will be provided, but goods will not be subject to routine holds at the border. From 30 April 2024, if a documentary check identifies that an EHC has not been provided or contains errors, the consignment will be held and may be subject to formal enforcement action.



## WHAT IS CERTIFICATION?

Certification is a process of checks made by an authorised Certifying Officer to confirm that biosecurity risks have been mitigated (as required by the importing country). The evidence for the certification is the Health Certificate.

## WHAT IS A HEALTH CERTIFICATE ?

A Health Certificate, or Export Health Certificate (EHC), is an official document[1] that contains information that identifies the consignment and confirms that certain health standards and regulations have been met, to mitigate biosecurity risks and allow animals and animal products to be imported into Great Britain (GB).

It is completed by a Certifying Officer (usually an Official Veterinarian), then it is recorded and issued in the country of origin. Official certificates include security features that make it difficult to falsify the certification or forge the certificate. Therefore, only the original document or secure electronically certified file is valid as the evidence of certification.



## WHAT IS A CONSIGNMENT ?

A consignment is a specified quantity of goods or animals that are certified together, i.e. via the same single Health Certificate, and that originate from the same place, and which are transported together on the same means of transport [2].

## WHERE DO I OBTAIN A HEALTH CERTIFICATE ?

For details on how to obtain a Health Certificate, you should contact the Competent Authority (government organisation or their representative [3]) local to where the certification is to take place, before the goods are despatched to Great Britain. Countries provide this information on their official websites.

## WHAT TAKES PLACE BEFORE I AM ISSUED WITH A HEALTH CERTIFICATE ?

An Official Veterinarian (OV) or other Certifying Officer, authorised by the Competent Authority [4] (CA) in the country of origin, may need to examine the consignment and/or inspect any appropriate records or documents. They need to confirm that the consignment meets Great Britain's animal and public health requirements as appropriate, for example that it or the region is free from contamination or disease. They will then complete and sign the certificate electronically and share it as a validatable PDF. If paper based, they would print, make their handwritten signature and officially stamp it. More detail on the circumstances in which GB accepts validatable PDF certificates is provided in the 'Digital Certification' section.

## WHO ISSUES (HANDS OVER ) THE CERTIFICATE ?

For electronically signed certification, the Competent Authority will issue a PDF file to the exporter or their representative. This can be validated against the original digital certification in the official database. If the certificate is paper based, the Certifying Officer or their representative hand over the completed original to the exporter or their representative.

## WHAT TO DO IF THE CONSIGNMENT IS MEDIUM RISK AND THERE IS NO HEALTH CERTIFICATE?

If a health certificate does not exist for the POAO goods you want to export from the EU to GB, and the export is permitted, you may need one or more of the following: commercial documents or an import licence or authorisation, which will state what import conditions will apply.

Contact the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) at [imports@apha.gov.uk](mailto:imports@apha.gov.uk) if:

- there's no licence for your animal or germinal product
- you're not sure if you need a licence
- if you are importing a medium risk POAO or RoW ABP but there's currently no health certificate for your goods

If you are importing medium risk ABP from the EU/EFTA countries and there is no health certificate available for your goods, your goods will require a commercial document from 31 January 2024, as opposed to an import license or authorisation.

# DIGITAL CERTIFICATION, DIGITAL COPIES AND PAPER-BASED HEALTH CERTIFICATES



## DIGITAL HEALTH CERTIFICATES AND TRACES [5]

**\*\*\*A digital copy of a paper-based certificate is not the same as a digitally signed electronic certificate.\*\*\***

### Digital Health Certificates and TRACES

The EU is transitioning from paper-based certification with handwritten signatures, to **digital certification**, with electronic signatures. The official system holds the record of certification in a digital format. Most EU member states use a system called TRACES for issuing electronic health certificates with secure exclusive account access by the Certifying Officers. Some member states and other EFTA countries use other Competent Authority systems to issue electronic health certificates. For further details on which countries can provide validatable PDF certificates please visit, [Countries Great Britain will accept validated PDF GB health certificates from - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/countries-great-britain-will-accept-validated-pdf-gb-health-certificates-from).

The exporting country's Competent Authority must provide an electronic file to exporters from the official system. Such copies must be in the correct format (a tamper proof, e-signed, time stamped and electronically sealed PDF) and this can be electronically validated against the electronic record of certification, by a GB inspector.

The .pdf file of the digital Health Certificate can be downloaded and emailed or electronically shared. The electronic pdf file must be forwarded by the exporter to the GB importer (or their representative) to allow them to upload this to the GB import notification system known as IPAFFS, in advance of the border crossing.

Where a validatable PDF certificate cannot be provided by the EU or EFTA country exporting the goods, the original paper certificate will need to accompany the consignment. A scanned copy or electronic image of the original paper certificate should be provided to the importer in GB and uploaded to the IPAFFS system.

## EUROPEAN UNION (EU) AND EFTA [6]: DO I NEED TO UPLOAD AN E-SIGNED PDF VERSION OF THE CERTIFICATE TO MY IMPORT-NOTIFICATION IN IPAFFS ?

From 31 January 2024 importers of animal products that need certification, originating in the EU and EFTA countries, or their import agents, should upload the pdf file, an officially validatable digital health certificate, created by the TRACES [7] system (or other approved EU/EFTA country system), to the GB import notification system, IPAFFS. If a validatable PDF certificate is not available, a paper certificate will need to accompany the consignment to GB.

The exporter is responsible for ensuring that the TRACES/EU or EFTA country system digitally signed Health Certificate is exported in the correct PDF format. For EU Member States that use TRACES, guidance can be found on the TRACES website at [TRACES \(europa.eu\)](https://traces.europa.eu) The exporter is responsible for sending the PDF copy of the digitally signed Health Certificate to the importer or their agent. If a paper certificate has been used, a scanned copy of the certificate should be provided.

As the importer or the import agent, you are responsible for creating the notification in IPAFFS and uploading the digitally signed PDF to that notification. If a paper certificate has been used, the scanned copy will need to be uploaded.

From 30 April 2024, for importers of animal products, when a border official or Border Control Post requires a certificate, they will make use of the uploaded copy to validate it against the electronic data record in TRACES or other approved EU/EFTA country system. Where the uploaded copy is not a copy of a digitally signed electronic certification in TRACES or other approved EU/EFTA country system, it is necessary to provide the original paper-based certificate, so that officials can verify the copy uploaded via IPAFFS against the original certificate. This will need to be sent to the BCP if the goods are not subject to a check at the border.





# WHERE CAN I FIND THE REQUIREMENTS FOR MY GOODS /ANIMALS TO BE CERTIFIED ?

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Great Britain's requirements can be found in the model health certificates for exporting live animals and animal products. This can be viewed here, [See model export health certificates for exporting live animals and animal products](#). The requirements are specific to the type of commodity and the purpose of the product. (The model certificates on GOV.UK are for information only and are templates to be used by the Competent Authorities of the exporting country).

The process for providing the necessary information is local and exporters should contact and check with their local authorities how this is done. Exporters may be given access to local electronic official systems for requesting a Health Certificate and to input the information required directly or may have to complete and submit application forms.

**Part I of the model certificate** lists all the information that will be required by your Certifying Officer to help them complete this part of the certificate.

The precise numbering of fields in Part I of an EHC can differ depending upon the product in question. However, the fields contained within Part I are broadly consistent.

The following guidance sets out answers to frequently asked questions regarding the completion of Part I:



## How do I complete 'Place of loading' (usually Box I.13)?

For animals, include: the name of the city or the place where the animals are loaded and, if they are assembled beforehand, the details of the official assembly centre.

For products, include: the name of the city and category (for example, establishment, holding, port or airport) of the final place where the products are to be loaded in the means of transport for the journey to GB.

If it's a container, give the place when the goods board the final means of transport to GB ferry, give the place where the truck embarked (i.e. the place where the truck joined the ferry). This means the 'place of loading' can differ depending on the 'means of transport' certified.



## How do I complete the 'Means of Transport' (Usually I.15)?

The last means of transportation used to make the journey to Great Britain should be entered here. Only one option should be selected from the listed options.

Indicate the registration number(s) of railway wagons and lorries, the names of ships and, if known, the flight numbers of aircraft.



When certifying animal product consignments as part of a groupage or mixed load into Great Britain, it is recognised that the identification of the final means of transport may not be available at the point of certification. In such cases, it is permissible for the certifying officer (CO) to use the word "groupage" as the identification of the means of transport. However, the final transport details must be provided accurately in the IPAFFS by the notifier in import declaration before the consignment arrives in Great Britain.

In the case of transport in containers or boxes, the total number of these and their registration and where there is a serial number of the seal it has to be indicated in box I.23.

## How do I complete 'Border Control Post' (usually Box I.16)?

For imports from non-EU/EFTA countries give the name of the BCP or the BCP identification code assigned by IPAFFS, [Import of products, animals, food and feed system \(IPAFFS\) - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/import-of-products-animals-food-and-feed-system-ipaffs) ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)), or both.

For imports of animal products from EU/EFTA countries from 31 January 2024 - 30 April 2024, this field can be certified N/A or struck through by the certifying OV.

## How do I complete 'Quantity' (usually box I.20)?

For:

- animals, give the total number of heads expressed as units
- germinal products, give the total number of straws expressed as units
- products and aquatic animals, except ornamental fish, the total gross and net weight in kilograms

**Total net weight:** this is defined as the mass of the goods themselves without immediate containers or any packaging.

**Total gross weight:** overall weight in kilograms. This is defined as the aggregate mass of the products and of the immediate containers and all their packaging but excluding transport containers and other transport equipment.

**Part II** lists the health requirements that the consignment must comply with and for which inspection visits may be required. Please also check any 'Notes for Completion' of the certificate, as requirements are often explained or detailed in the notes. Your Certifying Officer may require additional information to be provided.

# MOVEMENT OF PARCELS

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Movements of parcels from one business outside of GB to another in GB are subject to the same risk-based requirements (import notification via IPAFFS, health certification and checks, dependent on risk) as any other import of SPS goods. Parcel movements of this kind will also follow the same implementation timeline for SPS controls.



**For further information on how to complete Health Certificate** the exporter should contact their Competent Authority or an Official Vet in their country.

It is the responsibility of the exporting Competent Authority in the country of dispatch to issue Export Health Certification. Your exporting trading partner should contact their local Competent Authority to confirm how health certification for the goods is to be issued and follow any relevant local guidance.



## FOOTNOTES

[1] [Article 3 of OCR](#) - 'official certificate' means a paper or electronic document signed by the certifying officer and providing assurance concerning compliance with one or more requirements

[2] Reg 2017/625 definitions (art 3) (37) 'consignment' means a number of animals or quantity of goods covered by the same official certificate, official attestation or any other document, conveyed by the same means of transport and coming from the same territory or third country, and, except for goods subject to the rules referred to in point (g) of Article 1(2), being of the same type, class or description.

[3] Certifying Officer or Official Veterinarian

[4] Usually a government department or official government organisation. Each Country has its own arrangements. [5] Trade Control and Expert System (EU based electronic trading record system)

[6] European Free Trade Area (EFTA)

[7] Trade Control and Expert System (EU based electronic trading record system)



#### OGI open licence information

Importers should note that the information given relates only to animal health and public health conditions of import. It does not give guidance on other conditions that may need to be met.

Texts provided in this section are intended for information only - these texts have no legal value. For legal purposes please refer to the texts published in [legislation.gov.uk](http://legislation.gov.uk).

