

Pig Veterinary Society

THE CASUALTY PIG

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Introduction

The treatment of a casualty pig, i.e. one that is sick or injured, is in the hands of the producer. They should be influenced by animal welfare and public health considerations, not by economics. The pig's welfare should always be the first consideration. This opinion is the official policy of the Pig Veterinary Society.

The welfare of such animals is covered by the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which states that a person commits an offence if they either carry out an act, or **fail** to carry out an act, which causes an animal to suffer unnecessarily. This applies to any person who is responsible for an animal (including the owner, manager and stockkeepers). Failing to do something that is likely to prevent suffering is just as much an offence as directly causing suffering.

The acceptance of a casualty pig by an abattoir requires an owner's written declaration which must accompany any animal that is known to be, or is suspected of being, diseased or injured at the time it is consigned to a slaughterhouse. This is part of the mandatory food chain information, and the "Additional Food Chain Information" document must be completed if any treated or casualty animals are included in the consignment.

In addition, it is an offence to transport any animal in a way which causes, or is likely to cause, injury or unnecessary suffering to that animal (i.e. if they are "unfit") and the owner and the person in charge have a joint responsibility for the correct disposal of casualty animals. For example, it is illegal to load a lame pig onto a haulier's wagon and transport it a long distance simply to get the best price. Casualty animals may therefore need to be killed on the farm. On no account may any casualty be disposed of through a livestock market. Most slaughterhouses will not accept casualty pigs that have been killed on farm as an emergency slaughter case; therefore, it follows that pigs which are unfit for transport must be regarded as unfit to enter the food chain unless there is scope for home consumption.

When a casualty animal is fit to be transported it must be penned separately from other stock on the lorry and supplied with deep bedding. It should be taken to **the nearest suitable slaughterhouse**, and prior arrangement should have been made so that the animal can be slaughtered without undue delay after arrival.

A casualty pig that is kept on the farm for treatment should be housed separately in a warm, well-bedded pen (or with robust rubber mats or appropriate flooring), with food and water readily available. **The withdrawal period for any medicines administered must be allowed to elapse before the animal can be sold or supplied for slaughter.** Information about recent treatments is also required for the food chain information on the "Additional Food Chain Information" document that accompanies pigs to slaughter. Records of all medicines purchased and used are required.

Decision Options

When deciding on the correct action to take with a casualty pig you should consider: -

1. **Is the pig fit to travel?** – It is an offence to cause or permit an animal to be transported in a way that causes, or is likely to cause, injury or unnecessary suffering to the animal. Items you should consider are: -
 - a. Can the pig be loaded unassisted or without the need for more than usual encouragement?
 - b. Can the animal fully bear weight on all four legs and, if it is likely to stand during the journey, can it do so without pain or distress?
 - c. Does the pig have any open wounds or a prolapse?
 - d. Will transport cause the condition of the pig to deteriorate?
 - e. How far does the pig have to travel? Is there a suitable slaughterhouse near enough? (The animal should be sent to the nearest available slaughterhouse **that will accept the animal** not necessarily the one to which you usually market pigs).
 - f. Will the animal be penned separately on the lorry and be provided with suitable and adequate bedding for the journey?
2. **Will the carcase be fit for human consumption?**
Is there likely to be a condition such as septicaemia, abscesses, emaciation, jaundice, known or suspected zoonotic disease? It is illegal to send a pig to slaughter that is knowingly diseased.

If the answer to either of these two questions is 'No' then: -

3. **Is the animal suitable for treatment?**
or should it be killed on the farm on humane grounds?

If you are unsure about any of these points, then your veterinary surgeon should be contacted for advice. Your veterinary surgeon may wish to contact the abattoir operator and/or the Official Veterinarian (OV) at the abattoir to discuss the matter and ascertain what conditions they would be prepared to accept before giving you advice on any individual animal. The welfare of the pig is paramount. The availability of slaughterhouse services and even the location of the slaughterhouse may affect whether a pig is sent for slaughter or killed on the farm.

Possible Outcomes

There are four possible outcomes for a casualty pig: -

1. **Treat** - Give suitable treatment with veterinary advice and review progress daily. If the pig does not improve then it must be euthanased promptly and humanely. (Under most circumstances a significant improvement should be seen within a maximum of five days).
2. **Casualty slaughter** - The pig may be suitable for transport and slaughter in the nearest suitable slaughterhouse. It must be accompanied by an owner's written declaration (FCI).

3. **Euthanase** - The on-farm humane killing of the pig, where the pig is unfit to be transported alive or where there is no hope of treatment being successful. This may include on-farm slaughter where indicated and practical.
4. **Sell** - Normal slaughter or sale through other normal outlets, as appropriate (if the ailment is minor). Remember that the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 2006 prohibits the carriage of any animal if this is likely to cause them unnecessary suffering.

IF THERE IS ANY DOUBT AS TO WHICH COURSE OF ACTION IS THE MOST APPROPRIATE YOU SHOULD CONSULT YOUR VETERINARY SURGEON

Treatment

Any pig that appears to be ill or injured must be cared for without delay and veterinary advice should be obtained as soon as possible. Sick or injured pigs should be housed in suitable 'casualty' accommodation (treatment or hospital pens), with a dry comfortable bed or appropriate flooring, along with easy access to water, food, treatment and nursing. Isolation and separation from the main group is important as it can prevent further injury to that pig, reduce distress, and reduce the risk of spread of infection to the main group. It also allows easy identification and observation of the affected animal(s) and facilitates appropriate treatment. In some circumstances, pigs with minor ailments can be treated within their usual pen group, but this should be constantly reviewed (at least daily), and the pig removed to a treatment pen if any deterioration is noted.

As well as specific treatments for any disease-causing organisms, painkillers / anti-inflammatories should **always** be considered to help alleviate pain and discomfort.

All casualty pigs and pigs on treatment should be routinely assessed daily and **euthanased if realistic recovery is unlikely** or no progress is apparent. Comprehensive and clear records should be kept of each individual's treatment and progress. Ideally these records should be on or adjacent to each pen.

It is also a legal requirement that permanent records of treatment must be kept, including the name of the product, the name and address of the supplier, the date of purchase and administration, batch number, expiry date, the quantity administered, the identity of the individual, and the withdrawal period.

Although it is not a legal requirement, it is recommended that pigs treated in the finishing stage are ear tagged. This allows easy identification of the treated animal and confident completion of the FCI "additional declaration". It also allows monitoring and assessment of treatment outcomes.

If there is no response to treatment, or response is poor, **prompt** euthanasia is indicated. Stock-keepers should always seek a second opinion from a colleague or a veterinary surgeon if they are uncertain about the best course of action.

Assessment of Common Conditions

You should consult your veterinary surgeon to discuss conditions with suitable treatment options.

The following are common reasons for considering euthanasia of a pig on farm. The final decision will depend on the circumstances of the individual pig.

- Dystocia - sows cannot be sent for slaughter within one week of farrowing on welfare grounds. They must not be sent with retained piglets. It is prohibited for sows to be transported if they are more than 104 days in-pig; (transport regulations state that not more than 90% of gestation should have passed)
- Lameness – unable to stand, swollen infected joints, broken legs, severe sprains and dislocations, damaged claws
- Poor body condition, emaciation, runts, wasting-type pigs
- Rectal, vaginal and uterine prolapse
- Rectal Strictures (Barrel or Pot-bellied pigs)
- Tail bitten – tail gone, open wound, swollen with or without open wound
- Traumatic injuries and wounds – severe open wounds, multiple wounds, severe shoulder sores, burns (you cannot transport animals with open sores or wounds)
- Hernias – damaged, ulcerated skin, compromising health, condition or gait of the pig

IF IN ANY DOUBT ALWAYS ASK FOR A VETERINARY OPINION

The Humane Killing (euthanasia) of Pigs on the Farm

Never attempt to kill a pig unless you have received suitable training.

It is strongly recommended that anyone intending to kill a pig obtains suitable training and thereafter has their competency assessed by a veterinary surgeon. Most assurance schemes require that all persons conducting euthanasia independently on farm should have received training and been assessed in their competency regularly – please consult your scheme standards for the details of this. Training can be provided by your veterinary surgeon or the Humane Slaughter Association (HSA).

Any method of killing a pig humanely must ensure that the pig becomes unconscious immediately and remains unconscious until it is dead (this is a legal requirement) and that handling and restraint of the pig is appropriate and as stress free as possible. It is also important that the method chosen does not endanger human life.

The method used will depend on the size of the pig, where it is to be killed and whether it is to be killed by the veterinary surgeon, the farmer, or stockperson.

There are a number of firearms that are commonly used on farms to kill pigs humanely. These include shotguns, rifles, and other suitable firearms. All of these firearms are appropriate, provided that the person involved (whether it is the veterinary surgeon, a WATOK licence holder, the owner, or a stockperson) is familiar with the weapon and holds a valid shotgun and/or firearm certificate.

Firearms used for humane killing must have that condition stipulated under “Additional conditions may be added here by the Chief Officer of Police” on the first page of the Firearms Certificate, relating to that firearm. Shotguns, held on a Shotgun Certificate, do not require this condition.

Captive-bolt devices, whether penetrating or non-penetrating, do not require a firearm certificate. However, other than in an emergency, a WATOK licence must be held if a captive bolt is used to kill a pig (more information below) – this is required whether the carcass is destined for the food chain or incineration.

It is very important to distinguish between animals that require emergency killing and can therefore be dispatched on farm without a WATOK licence, and those that do not meet the definition of ‘emergency killing’, and whose euthanasia can therefore reasonably be planned for, which would therefore require licencing. If in any doubt, the advice of your veterinary surgeon should be sought.

The following is the legal definition of Emergency Killing: -

“...the killing of animals which are injured or have a disease associated with severe pain or suffering and where there is no other practical possibility to alleviate this pain or suffering”

Once the decision has been made, those pigs deemed as emergencies must be euthanased **as soon as possible**.

In an emergency a pig can be killed by any means as long as that means is effective and kills the animal humanely without causing any avoidable pain, distress or suffering and the legal requirements are met. For piglets this includes the use of a non-penetrative device like the Cash Small Animal Tool (providing you have been trained to use it). There are circumstances in which killing with a firearm or stunning with a captive bolt may be either undesirable or dangerous, for example when a sow is wedged in a crate. Under these circumstances it may be necessary to ask your veterinary surgeon to kill the pig humanely with an overdose of anaesthetic. A pig killed in this way cannot be used for human **or** animal consumption.

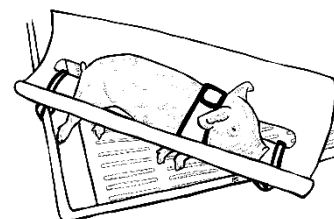
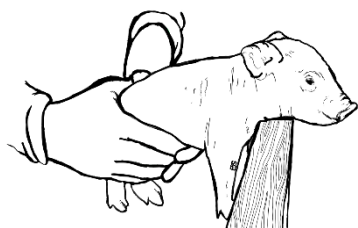
It is strongly recommended that **every** site of pig keeping (farm) has a named person responsible for animal welfare and for the euthanasia of any stock on that site. This person would have overall responsibility for decision making, the outcome of the decisions, and the humane euthanasia of any animal. This person would not necessarily have to carry out the euthanasia but would bear the ultimate responsibility for what happens on the site/farm. Regardless of this, the euthanasia of any distressed animal should not be delayed if this named person is not on-site.

Methods of Humane Euthanasia

The following descriptions are intended as guidelines only. Please discuss them with your veterinary surgeon.

It is essential that pigs are killed quickly and humanely. This requires patience, preparation, time and confidence. Where a pig is to be shot or stunned, the pig should first be restrained. For a pig of sufficient size, this should be with a wire noose or rope around its upper jaw, with the person holding the rope standing in front of the pig and thus behind the operator.

For smaller pigs to be euthanised with a non-penetrative captive bolt, there is as yet no clear consensus on the optimum method of restraint. The most important considerations are immobilisation of the pig's head against a firm surface to ensure maximum impact energy is transferred to the subject, as well as operator safety. For very small/neonatal pigs the only way to achieve this practically may be to manually restrain the pig against a hard surface as shown below. For larger pigs a variety of methods are available, and operators should select their preferred technique in consultation with their veterinary surgeon. An example is shown for illustrative purposes.



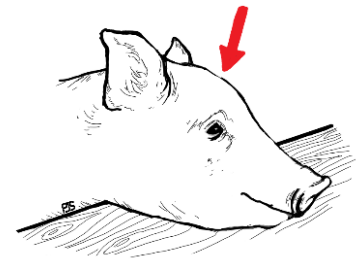
Never restrain a pig by holding its ear in one hand and using the captive-bolt / humane killer with the other. Never attempt to shoot an unrestrained pig, as it might move at the time of firing and receive an off-site shot which injures, but does not render it unconscious.

It is **essential** that animals are observed during the process of euthanasia to ensure that they lose consciousness **immediately** once the method of stunning is applied and that consciousness is never regained. This can be done by touching the surface of the eyeball to ensure there is no corneal reflex (blinking), as well as observing that there is no rhythmical breathing or coordinated movements (agonal gasping and uncoordinated movements are to be expected and should not be confused with a return to conscious feeling).

It is also essential to check that the animal dies. Death is a process, and this should be expected to take some time, often **in excess of 5 minutes**. Provided a continued lack of consciousness is assured by using the above, there is no welfare concern created by this length of time as the animal will be unable to feel any pain. A heartbeat can be checked for by feeling in-between the ribs just behind the elbow, this will be easier on the pig's downward side. Once no heartbeat can be felt, death can be confirmed.

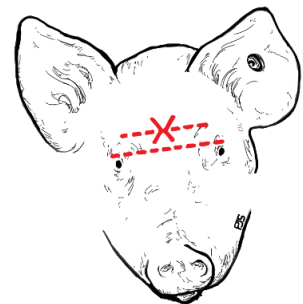
1. **Non-Penetrative Captive Bolt Device (for animals up to 10kg)**

It is important to ensure that the device being used is capable of supplying a minimum of 27.7 joules of energy and that the appropriate strength of cartridge is used to achieve this. With the pig adequately restrained as discussed above, the device should be placed on the midline between the eyes and the ears on the frontal/parietal bone, as shown. These devices are considered a method of killing and as such no secondary step should be required.

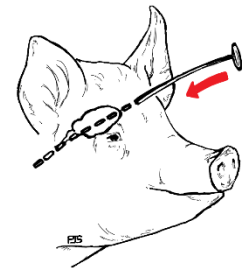


2. **Captive-Bolt Stunner**

The site of stunning is on the mid-line of the forehead, one finger's width above eye level, and the muzzle of the stunner should be placed against the head and directed towards the brain, aiming for the back of the pig's throat. It is recommended that the most powerful cartridge suitable for the device is used. After the pig has been stunned it should **in all cases** be either pithed or bled out before it regains consciousness.



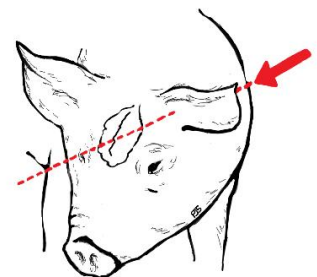
If you are to pith the pig, training should be sought so that you are competent to carry this out swiftly and effectively. The aim is to destroy the brainstem within the skull so that the control of breathing and circulation is irreparably damaged and both will stop, rendering the pig dead.



Bleeding out is by means of a deep cut across the throat from ear to ear with a sharp knife in order to sever all the major blood vessels to bring about fast and continuous bleeding. An alternative, if you have been trained, is to 'stick' the pig through the base of the neck into the chest to sever the major thoracic blood vessels, as is done in abattoirs. When trained to use this method, it results in rapid blood loss and subsequent swift death.

3. **Shotgun**

Where the operator is competent in the use of a shotgun, this is probably the ideal way to kill any pig of a suitable size humanely. The site of shooting is either the same as for the captive bolt (the preferred site), or through an eye, or from behind an ear, pointing in the direction of the brain, as shown. In each case the muzzle of the gun should be held between 10 and 25 cm away from the head. A 12-bore is only appropriate for adult / finishing pigs. A 0.410 shotgun is more appropriate for younger pigs.



4. **0.22 Rim Fire Rifle**

The site of shooting is the same as for the captive-bolt, but the muzzle of the rifle should be held between 10 and 25 cm way from the head. This is only suitable for pig up to 24 weeks of age (approximately 110 Kg). Only a standard velocity, 0.22 Long Rifle ammunition is to be used. **This should be used only in extreme emergency when no other firearm is available. By law 0.22 rim-fire rifles may only be used for the purposes specified on the firearm certificate.**

5. **Free Bullet Humane Killer**

The site of shooting is the same as for the captive bolt, aiming down the spinal column, so as to direct the free bullet into the body of the pig. It is very important to ensure that if the bullet should pass out of the pig's body it will not ricochet off concrete floors or walls (these are prohibited firearms and **do** require a firearms certificate, and licences are restricted to a very small number of professions).

It is the current understanding of the society that only methods of euthanasia listed in Annex 1 of the protection of animals at the time of killing Regulations (Regulation 1099/2009) may be used to kill pigs on farm. This does not include the use of a non-mechanically applied percussive blow to the head of piglets. Where the definition for emergency killing can be applied, any method can be used to kill a pig as long as it renders it immediately unconscious.

6. **External Trauma – Emergency Killing ONLY**

Where carried out by a competent and confident operator, a sharp firm blow on the top of the head over the brain, sufficient to break and depress the cranium of the skull, is an effective way of killing pigs that are no older than four weeks of age and no more than 5kg in weight. It is essential that the blow is administered swiftly, firmly and with absolute determination. If there is any doubt whether the pig is dead, the blow should be immediately repeated. The blow must cause immediate loss of consciousness, and this should remain so until both breathing and circulation have stopped.

Disposal of Dead Stock

Animals which are humanely destroyed on farm cannot be buried or burnt in the open. Dead stock must be disposed of by collection by a licensed operator, taken to or collected by a knacker, hunt kennel, renderer, or be incinerated on-farm in a licensed incinerator.

Obtaining a WATOK Licence

If a WATOK licence is required on farm, this will need to be applied for and obtained through APHA and will then be issued by the FSA. As the process currently stands (please check for the current situation), applications need to be made for an individual who must be 18 years of age or over, declare any previous animal welfare convictions, provide a recent photograph, and clearly state what procedures are being applied for and for which species. These procedures could include: -

- Appropriate restraint of the animal in question
- Use of a penetrative captive bolt
- Use of a non-penetrative captive bolt (for piglets)
- Assessing an effective stunning
- Pithing
- Bleeding of live animals
- Monitoring for the absence of signs of life

Full training should be received by the applicant prior to being put forward for initial assessment and this can be provided in several different ways including from a suitably experienced veterinary surgeon – if in doubt please consult your designated herd veterinary surgeon. A signed veterinary certificate of assessment can speed up the formal WATOK licence assessment process.

The formal WATOK license assessment will be carried out by an authorised veterinary surgeon (from APHA), who will visit your farm to observe the applicant's practical skills in carrying out the procedures and their understanding of the statutory requirements that have been applied for on the application. The assessment will only cover the procedures, equipment and species that have been noted on the initial application form. There is a standard charge made by APHA (available on their website) to cover the assessment process and multiple people can be assessed on a single visit if appropriate. Once complete and the applicant has been assessed as competent, the final licence is obtained from the FSA.

APPENDIX 1

General Rules for the Safe Use of Firearms

- 1)** Farmers who are competent handlers of shotguns should seek instruction from their veterinary surgeon on their use as a humane killer, but where one is not available, and particularly on large units staffed by young personnel, it is better to purchase and then receive instruction and be assessed for competence by a (your) veterinary surgeon on the use of a captive-bolt device.
- 2)** Never point any gun, loaded or unloaded, at anything you do not intend to shoot.
- 3)** Always treat every gun as if it were loaded.
- 4)** Obtain instruction from a trained firearms instructor before using any gun.
- 5)** Keep your finger off the trigger until you wish to fire.
- 6)** Be certain the gun is unloaded before cleaning it and always clean it after use.
- 7)** Always unload the gun before entering a place where there are people and ideally have a second person to confirm that you have unloaded it.
- 8)** Never leave any gun unattended.
- 9)** Store guns and ammunition locked away separately, and out of reach of children.
- 10)** Before you shoot be sure your backstop area is safe, that shot(s) cannot ricochet off a solid floor or wall, and that there is no-one in range. Be prepared for a bullet to travel clean through a pig's head and hit the ground below the pig. It may ricochet from there.
- 11)** Do not handle a gun while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- 12)** Never pull a gun towards you by the muzzle.
- 13)** Do not climb over a gate, wall, or fence whilst carrying a loaded gun.
- 14)** Load and unload with the muzzle pointing in a safe direction.
- 15)** If a gun fails to fire when the trigger is pulled, keep it pointed at the target for at least 30 seconds. Sometimes slow primary ignition will cause a hang-fire, and the cartridge will go off after a short pause.
- 16)** Never put your hand over the muzzle of a gun.
- 17)** Check the ammunition is the right size and calibre and is not dented.
- 18)** Never allow any firearm to point at any part of your body or at another person.
- 19)** Always hold a pistol in your dominant hand and use the other for cocking.

APPENDIX 2

Relevant Legislation

Note: - Legislation can be amended or repealed and new legislation can be enacted at any time. Do not consider this to be a permanent or definitive list. The regulations as quoted apply to England. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland may have their own regulations, which although usually similar, may differ in detail. EU regulations on food hygiene are implemented indirectly in the UK by the Food Hygiene (England/Scotland Wales/NI) Regulations, as assimilated law. It is each person's own responsibility to be aware of any current regulations.

Welfare:

- Animal Welfare Act 2006
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/contents>
- Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended 2010)
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/2078/contents/made>
- The Welfare of Animals at Markets Order 1990 (as amended 1993)
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1990/2628/contents/made>

Welfare at slaughter/ killing legislation:

- Assimilated Regulation 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing (PATOK)
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2022/33/contents/made>
- Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 (WATOK)
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/1782/contents>

Transport legislation:

- The Welfare of Animals (Transport) England Order 2006
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/3260/pdfs/uksi_20063260_en.pdf
- Assimilated Council Regulation (EC) No. 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2005/1/contents>

Residues:

- The Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013 as amended, most recently 2024
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/567/contents/made>
- Animals and Animal Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) Regulations 2015 (as amended 2019 and 2020)
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/787/contents>

Food Hygiene

- Assimilated Regulation (EC) no 853/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the Hygiene of Foodstuffs
<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2004:139:0001:0054:en:PDF>

- Assimilate Regulation (EC) no 853/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for on the hygiene of foodstuffs of animal origin (includes Food Chain Information (FCI) requirements in Section 3, and Annex III outlines specific requirements related to transport, slaughter and cutting hygiene, emergency slaughter, storage and transport)
<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2004:226:0022:0082:EN:PDF>

Animal By-Products

- The Animal By-Products Regulations 2005 (covers the disposal of fallen stock and ABPs not intended for human consumption)
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/2347/contents/made>
- The Animal By-Products (Enforcement) (England) Regulations 2011
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/881/contents/made>
- The Specified Risk Material Regulations 1997
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1997/2965/contents/made>
- The Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (England) Regulations 2010 (as amended)
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/801/pdfs/uksi_20100801_en.pdf

Updates can be downloaded from: -

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/>

Further information from: -

AHDB Pork; <https://ahdb.org.uk/pork>

Humane Slaughter Association; www.hsa.org.uk; or 01582 831 919