



**ASHFORD**  
Port Health

# Safeguarding the UK's biosecurity and public health

## Securing Britain's food chain

Ashford Port Health is responsible for border checks on imported high-risk food and feed that enter the UK from the European Union through the Port of Dover and the Channel Tunnel



**Operates  
24 hours a day,  
7 days a week**

**14,000**

Consignments of meat and dairy products inspected since January 10, 2025

**12,600**

Consignments of meat and dairy products that have passed inspection since January 10, 2025

**66,032**

The number of kilos of illegal meat destroyed since November 2024

**20,000**

The number of kilos of contaminated fruit and vegetables seized since November 2024



## What is the Ashford Port Health Authority?

The Ashford Port Health Authority, managed by Ashford Borough Council, is based at the Sevington Inland Border Facility near Ashford. It currently provides checks on imported high-risk food and feed, products of animal origin, and high-risk food and feed of non-animal origin. It is one of the top three performing Port Health Authorities in the country, alongside the City of London and Suffolk Coastal PHA.

## What is the difference between an Inland Border Facility and a Border Control Post?

Inland border facilities are UK government sites where customs and document checks can take place away from port locations. A Border Control Post (BCP) is a place within the Inland Border Facility where animals, plants, and their products coming into the UK from the EU and other third countries via seaports or airports are checked.

## What checks are completed by Ashford Port Health Authority?

Ashford Port Health is responsible for checks at Sevington Border Control Post on freight traffic carrying commercial imports from mainland Europe for the following items:

- Germplasm (hatching eggs)
- Fresh meat
- Meat products
- Milk and dairy products
- Animal by-products such as pet-food

## What will the EU/UK deal announced in May 2025 mean for these checks?

The outline deal announced between the UK government and the European Union in May 2025 will ultimately mean fewer checks on commercial imports. For the moment it is business as usual while the details of a final agreement are decided.

Over the next few months there will be further detailed negotiations on how the changes will be implemented.

## How does Ashford Port Health Authority protect the public?

Ashford Port Health ensures biosecurity by stopping goods that pose a risk, such as those from regions with known issues to human health or animal health from disease or contamination.

Ashford Port Health plays a vital role in helping to enhance safety and security of the UK food chain. The service plays an active role in the Association of Port Health Authorities and collaborates with other local authorities and Border Force to deliver best practice.

## Who works at the Border Control Post?

The Ashford Port Health team includes around 20 Environmental Health Officers (EHOs), supported by a pool of specialist vets. A further 20 EHOs are being trained thanks to grant assistance from the Food Standards Agency.

## What other agencies operate out of the Border Control Facility at Sevington?

The Animal Plant and Health Agency check imported plants and seeds with Border Force and HMRC staff responsible for custom checks of freight traffic directed to the site.



## What are the hours of operation at the Border Control Post?

The Border Control Post at Sevington operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## How many checks does the Border Control Post at Sevington handle?

The Border Control Post (BCP) at Sevington is now one of the busiest in the United Kingdom with hundreds of checks on imported food daily. More than 14,000 consignments of meat and dairy products have been inspected by Ashford Port Health between January and April 2025.

## How many checks have passed or failed inspection?

12,600 have passed inspection since January 2025 with 334 loads held, rejected or destroyed with 66,032 kilos of illegal meat have been destroyed since November 2024.

## Can freight traffic coming from Europe just turn up at the site?

No. Freight operators returning to the UK through the Port of Dover or the Channel Tunnel must give at least one working day notification of their arrival back in the country. Instructions are then given for those carrying relevant imported commercial goods to head to Sevington for inspection.

## Is it a legal requirement to report to a Border Control Post for checks?

It is a legal requirement for businesses to be compliant with the Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) processes and controls, which includes complying with an instruction to attend a Border Control Post for inspection.

## When must HGVs or freight operators report for checks?

Importers and import agents need to use the import of products, animals, food and feed system (IPAFFS) to notify authorities in the UK about imports to Great Britain.

HGVs or freight carriers only need to attend an Inland Border Facility if travelling through the Port of Dover or Eurotunnel and are moving goods into the country and have been instructed to report to a site for those goods to be checked.

## How do those told to report for checks know where to go?

Drivers will be given instruction on which Border Control Post to attend. For HGVs there is signage from the Port of Dover or Eurotunnel at Folkestone for those needing to report to Sevington Inland Border Facility.

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## If the driver of imported foods is instructed to report to an inland border facility for inspection and ignores the request what happens?

Ignoring instructions from HMRC, Ashford Port Health and other agencies operating at the Sevington Inland Border Facility can result in fines and potential prosecution. The severity of the penalty will depend on the nature and consequences of the error, omission or other action.

## What happens when HGVs arrive at the Inland Border Facility?

Arriving freight traffic is greeted by a traffic management marshal and directed to a vacant parking bay and asked to switch off their engine. If goods have been flagged as 'held' for a compliance check, freight drivers must tell front office staff when they arrive.

## What security measures are in place at the Inland Border Facility?

There are automatic number plate recognition cameras at the entry and exit points of the site. These monitor vehicles entering and exiting the site to manage traffic and security.

## What do freight drivers or operators need to show when they arrive?

Freight drivers or operators will be expected to have all the relevant paperwork for importing goods into the UK. This will be checked for compliance once they have arrived at the Inland Border facility.



## What happens once paperwork is processed?

Freight drivers will receive either an approval and exit receipt to move off site, or a non-approval where they will follow a separate process. If approval is given to exit the site HGVs are able to re-join the strategic main road and continue their journey.

## How long can checks take to complete at the Inland Border facility?

It can take between 1 and 2 hours at the facility to go through customs clearance. The sites are manned 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

## If the driver of imported food is denied entry to the UK and ignores the order to return to the EU what happens?

A process is in place for freight that has not been granted entry for the UK.

Ignoring instructions can result in fines and potential prosecution. The severity of the penalty will depend on the nature and consequences of the error, omission or other action.

## If the driver or freight operator fails to declare prohibited or restricted food items what happens?

Failing to declare prohibited or restricted food items can result in fines and potential prosecution. There are also other sanctions including the forced closure of a company in extreme cases. The severity of the penalty will depend on the nature and consequences of the error or omission.

## What role is Ashford Port Health playing in protecting the UK from outbreaks of animal health diseases such as Foot and Mouth?

Ashford Port Health plays an important role in ensuring food imports coming into the UK are safe. The team is undertaking hundreds of checks on imported food daily, working 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

There have been a series of animal health disease outbreaks, including Foot and Mouth Disease, in other parts of the world which has required Ashford Port Health to move at a great pace and comply with legislation and new safeguard measures. The team remain vigilant as it plays its part in keeping the UK disease-free.

## Is there any risk to the public by imports not being checked at the Port of Dover first rather than travelling in land?

Commercial imports are self-declared before arriving at the Port of Dover. While freight lorries are unescorted between the port and the border control post at Sevington, lorries are sealed at their point of origin and cannot be opened until they reach the Border Control Post without the seal breaking. HMRC and Border Force have procedures in place to deal with any vehicles that do not arrive.

There is no evidence whatsoever that any goods imported and notified through the import of products, animals, food and feed system (IPAFFS) have ever been unloaded en route to the facility.

## Could checks be carried out closer to the border?

The purpose-built facility at Sevington for commercial imports was chosen because of its more accessible location on the strategic road network. Personal imports are still dealt with at the Port of Dover, St Pancras International for Eurostar services or Coquelles in France for Eurotunnel services.

## Is there a risk to the public if freight drivers importing goods from areas where animal disease outbreaks have happened are ordered back to the EU?

Checks carried out at the Border Control Post will ensure that any imports found to originate from countries at-risk or where documentation is incorrect will be dealt with to ensure no high-risk foods enter the food chain.



## Could illegal meat mixed in with commercial consignments still be off loaded before reporting to Sevington?

All lorries have seals attached to their rear doors at the point of origin. These are broken with a Port Health Officer in attendance at the border control post at Sevington. This forms part of the checking process. Seal numbers are also included in paperwork such as export health certificates.

Failing to declare prohibited or restricted food items can result in fines and potential prosecution. There are also other sanctions including the forced closure of a company in extreme cases.

## Why is the work of agencies such as Ashford Port Health so important?

Veterinary experts, plant and animal health inspectors employed by Ashford Port Health play a critical role in safeguarding the UK's biosecurity and public health.

## Find out more

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