

Ash Dieback Disease FAQs



Questions (received from clubs) and answers (from British Orienteering Environmental Officer, Peter Brett) regarding Ash Dieback Disease

Original news item

Advice for orienteers on Ash Dieback disease

Concerns have been raised in the media recently over the threat to ash trees in the UK following the identification of the potentially deadly disease of Ash Dieback (*Chalara faxinea*).

British Orienteering has issued the following advice to all clubs on the biosecurity measures that should be taken by all orienteers (i.e. Planners, Controllers and control hangers, as well as competitors) when holding or participating in an area suspected to contain Ash trees:

- Thoroughly wash all footwear before leaving the area, ensuring that all mud, soil and leaf litter is removed. Event organisers may wish to provide water, buckets and brushes at a suitable location i.e. at a point where there is little risk of further contamination.
- On returning home, rinse all boots and shoes in a chlorine based cleaner or garden fungicide and allow them to dry thoroughly. N.B. *please read the manufacturer's label and follow their instructions on use and disposal of the product.*
- Thoroughly wash and dry all kit and any other clothing that may potentially have been contaminated with fungal spores.
- Clothing and footwear should not be reused for at least 48 hours after drying.

While it is currently thought that the disease is restricted to East Anglia and the South East of England, this position may change as Forestry Commission pathologists and surveyors enter more woodlands.

Peter Brett, Environment Officer

FAQs (answers in red)

- On what basis have these measures been devised? For example, are they based on advice from the government, the Forestry Commission or eminent scientists in countries where the disease is already present? Have they been requested by landowners? The disease is said to spread on the wind and through tree planting and all scientific opinion appears to be that it is impossible to stop it. In fact, we hear that the government has now given up attempting to contain the spread. So, is there evidence that these measures will make a difference? **The biosecurity measures are those recommended by Defra/Fera/FC for anyone who strays off the main path network in infected or potentially infected woodlands. While it is still early days with regard to our understanding of the disease in the UK some woodland owners have already raised concerns over the potential for our sport to transport the disease to as yet uninfected woodlands. The measures recommended will prevent orienteers from transporting the disease, but do nothing to stop movement by other biotic or abiotic vectors.**
- If these measures are necessary then they need to be applied consistently. We have already heard of one event where the measures have been applied and others where they haven't. If these measures are necessary they should be mandated, either for all events or for all events in specified locations or circumstances. Giving discretion to individual clubs means that any protection afforded will be patchy and hence ineffective, while the sport risks appearing disorganised. **These measures only need to be applied where events are held in woodlands, parks and gardens where Ash is present and we would hope that clubs and their event officials will take their responsibilities seriously with the aim of maintaining the good name of our sport. It should be remembered that BOF issued its advice via the website as this was the quickest way of reaching the largest proportion of the membership. Unfortunately not all members study every posting on the website and it is to be hoped that those event organisers who failed to provide suitable**

cleaning stations fell into that category rather than an act of malice. The December edition of Focus will contain a more up-to-date statement.

- The measures proposed are quite onerous for organisers and competitors. If we start to apply them now, we should be prepared to continue doing so until the disease has been eradicated or there is no prospect of its further progression. Based on current estimates that could be until 2020 at least. Is the sport committed to take these measures for this length of time? **The Government's position with regard to the actions to be taken to contain this disease remain fluid and are evolving almost daily. In truth most practitioners agree that it will be impossible to prevent the spread of the disease given the distribution of Ash. That said it is the responsibility of all BOF members to do nothing that will tarnish the good name of our sport.**
- These measures require action by individuals after an event, at home, as well as by clubs and organisers at events. Will BOF communicate this to its membership? Will government or other bodies communicate similarly to ramblers, dog walkers, cyclists and other forest users? **As stated above the Government has issued advice through its dedicated website, including an online poster which owners can print off and place at woodland entrances. Again as already mentioned an article will appear in the next edition of Focus.**

Comments regarding Ash Dieback from members and clubs

Mike,

As a woodland owner I am concerned about Ash Dieback disease and am happy that BOF are taking the threat seriously. However I am not sure that the advice given is proportionate to the risk of spreading the disease through orienteering activity. The Forestry Commission information is at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara> . I have extracted some points :-

- the spores are unlikely to survive for more than a few days
- spore dispersal on the wind is possible from mainland Europe
- trees need a high dose of spores to become infected
- the spores are produced from infected dead leaves during the months of June to September
- there is a low probability of dispersal on clothing or animals and birds

There is also a video showing how to recognise the symptoms that it would be useful to draw mappers and planners attention too next spring.

Biosecurity in general is of increasing concern to landowners and it is certainly good practice to clean shoes before leaving home, especially if traveling to a different part of the country.

The list of existing problems at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infid-6abl5v> is very worrying but fortunately from the orienteering point of view most are spread by insects or the wind. [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Pests_established_in_UK.pdf/\\$FILE/Pests_established_in_UK.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Pests_established_in_UK.pdf/$FILE/Pests_established_in_UK.pdf) is informative on the subject.

Most outbreaks are associated with newly planted nursery stock, except in East Anglia, and seem to form a line from Leicester to Stockton on Tees. (I don't think this distribution is significant.) So far there are no reports in the South East with the closest being in St Albans.

Response from Peter Brett, Environmental Officer

The biosecurity measures proposed by BOF are based on the guidance given on the FC website and advice provided for competing in areas affected by *Phytophthora ramorum*. With regard to the other points raised:

- Spores are likely to survive longer than 48 hours if subject to moist conditions such as damp running shoes stores in the garage; hence the comment to thoroughly dry shoes and clothing before reusing.
- Wind is certainly a factor in moving spores, however, our concern is that orienteers don't move spores large distances against the prevailing wind e.g. Lincolnshire to Cumbria.

- Our observations of the debate suggest that scientists throughout Europe are still trying to understand the disease and that a realistic degree of caution will enhance our status with many landowners.
- While most fungi are now dormant it is as well to establish a sensible biosecurity regime before the critical season.
- While there is a low risk of movement of the disease by mammals (humans included) there is still a risk and it would be extremely difficult to disprove an accusation of orienteers transporting the disease from one woodland to another.