



Dealing with Actual and Potential Risks

YARNFIELD PARK Staffordshire ST15 0NL



Exploring risk across Veterinary Public Health and One Health

Communicating and managing risk in ways that are relevant, understandable and practical — whether speaking with a 7-year-old or a 70-year-old.

This conference will explore how we live, eat, drink, cohabit, trade, work with animals, handle infection and infestation, transmit disease, examine, diagnose, operate, medicate, vaccinate, euthanise — speaking freely and openly about risk.

Join us for thought-provoking examples and discussion on the actual and potential risks faced by veterinary and allied professionals working in Veterinary Public Health and One Health.

The conference opens on **Friday 25 September at 4.00 pm** with **VPHA Student Ambassadors from UK veterinary schools** leading informal, relaxed and frank round-table discussions. Attendees will be invited to share real-life examples of actual and potential risk, including:

- 1) Examples of good risk communication
- 2) Examples where communication could have been better

Saturday 26 September 2026 | Start time: 9.15 am

The Certainty Trap: risk, trust, communication, and action in a rapidly changing world

Dr Alex Taxer Bristol, Associate Professor in One Health, SFHEA, MRCVS, FRSPH, FRAI, DPhil, MSc, BVetMed, BSc



Our training, our institutions, and our communication habits are still largely built around the illusion of certainty: clear answers, confident recommendations, tidy risk categories. This session challenges that assumption. Drawing on risk communication research, real-world outbreak response, and emerging frameworks for decision-making under uncertainty, we'll explore what it actually means to lead, communicate, and act well when we don't - and can't - know enough.

Famous Last Words: The Difficulty with Risk Communication

Dr Darren A Cutts (PhD BSc), Head of Meat Hygiene Policy, Food Standards Agency



This presentation will cover the difficulties in trying to communicate with stakeholders and managing the science policy “interface”, drawing out how the Vet profession in particular is integral in this role. We'll also cover “The Bigger Picture” and “Unintended Consequences” which are phrases used all the time in risk communication, but what do they actually mean? Although we will talk about the importance of the veterinary profession, I can't promise there won't be a little bit of physics somewhere!



Public Health Response: Decisions in the Face of Uncertainty, Evidence, Precaution and Proportionality

Dr David Edwards BSc, MSc, MPhil, PGDip, PhD, FRSPH, FFPH

Lead Consultant in Health Protection, UKHSA, East of England Health Protection Team



Risk assessment and decision-making for public health incidents and outbreaks must consider the wider impact of possible interventions. This can be especially challenging when evidence is limited, such as with novel infections, new exposures or animal diseases. Evidence-based practice, grounded in health protection principles, provides a robust approach to protecting the public.

New Risks in a Digital Age: What AI Means for Food Systems

Prof Simon Pearson, Director of the Lincoln Institute of Agri Food Technology (LIAT), FSA member of Science Council



AI is increasingly used to analyse, predict and inform decisions across the food chain, but it also introduces new and often poorly understood risks. Drawing on work with the FSA, this talk explores issues such as bias, overconfidence in automated outputs, data quality, and loss of transparency. It will consider how veterinary professionals can recognise, question and safely work with AI in practice and policy.

Evidence-based policy making: Communicating animal health risks to policy makers in DEFRA

Dr Catherine McCarthy BVetMed PhD dipECVPH (PM) MRCVS, Veterinary Risk Lead, UK Office for SPS Trade Assurance, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)



“All models are wrong, but some are useful.” Animal disease risks are complex and uncertain, yet governments must still make clear decisions. This talk explores how risk assessment translates veterinary epidemiology into practical policy insight, highlighting where the real risks of animal disease entering Great Britain lie, what drives them, and how imperfect models can still support transparent, proportionate decision-making. It will also explore how skills developed in veterinary school and clinical practice provide a strong foundation for translating complex messages for senior policy makers.



Risk, Responsibility, and Raw Feeding: Communicating Emerging Infection Risk in Companion Animals

Dr Elizabeth Bruno-McClung, BSc (Hons) BVM&S MSc (Public Health) MRCVS



Small Animal Expert Group Veterinary Lead, APHA

Liz graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 2011 and worked in small animal practice before completing an MSc in Public Health at LSHTM in 2021. She currently leads APHA's Small Animal Expert Group, focusing on new and re-emerging threats in small animals. Liz is a workstream lead for the WOAHC Collaborating Centre for Risk Analysis and Modelling and is undertaking a European College of Veterinary Public Health residency.

Risk management and communication pose particular challenges in the small animal sector. Drawing on a cluster of *Mycobacterium caprae* infections in domestic cats, this presentation examines how early signals, uncertainty and diverse expectations interact in small animal veterinary public health. The cluster's association with raw pet food feeding offers important lessons for proportionate risk communication that reflects the diverse values shaping individual choice.

Risk it for the biscuit?

Alan Murphy, APHA Veterinary Lead for Toxicology and Chemical Feed and Food Safety



Every decision we make carries some element of risk. Are we becoming more risk averse, even while we are knee-deep in risk assessments? It is amazing that we make any decisions at all, and yet, for me, the biscuit remains very attractive. This session will offer a perspective on realistic risk communication. We often deal with dynamic situations that require flexibility in what we say and how we say it. We may even find ourselves contradicting previous advice. What are the optics in such situations? Too much information, too little information or simply poorly packaged information can all have undesirable consequences. Not everyone a veterinary surgeon engages with is a citizen scientist, graduate or professor — and why should they be? Risk is personal, yet government has the unenviable role of trying to address it collectively.

Alan qualified from Glasgow Veterinary School in 1990 and spent sixteen years in livestock practice, predominantly in the Northwest of England. He was awarded a Diploma in Bovine Reproduction during this time.

He joined the Veterinary Laboratories Agency in 2006 as a Veterinary Investigation Officer. While based principally at the Sutton Bonington site, he also worked across multiple locations, building extensive knowledge of pathology and disease diagnosis.

He undertook further study and gained an MSc in Applied Toxicology with Distinction from the University of Surrey. He also worked as a part-time lecturer at Nottingham Veterinary School, as Clinical Assistant Professor in Farm Animal Pathology, for five years until 2024.

He is currently the APHA veterinary lead for toxicology and chemical feed and food safety. He is also involved in the non-statutory zoonosis programme, provides training to government veterinary surgeons and is the lead for the Moredun Research Institute's South of England Board.