

Ash dieback - advice to schools

What is ash dieback?

Ash dieback is a serious disease of native European ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, formerly known as *Chalara fraxinea*. The pathogen causes leaf loss and crown dieback weakening the trees and usually leading to premature tree death through secondary infection and / or environmental stress. European ash is most severely affected, although some exotic ash species are also vulnerable. Young trees usually succumb rapidly to infection. Although there is no treatment, a small percentage of ash may be resistant to, or tolerant of, the infection. Survivors can be used for breeding tolerant ash trees for the future.

Why is this important?

Nearly 21% of all trees in West Sussex are ash; it is our most common and widespread tree. The disease has the potential to kill up to 95% of ash trees over the next 10-15 years. This will have a major impact on the county's landscape, the wildlife it supports and the other ecosystem services that trees provide such as:

- filtering the air
- storing carbon
- reducing flooding
- providing shade
- protecting soils.

The nature of the infection results in tissue death and branch failure, which in turn, may have health and safety implications.

How to identify ash dieback

There are a range of signs which can help identify infected trees:

- dead or dying tops of trees and abnormal clusters of twigs resulting from re-growth
- wilting leaves visible in summer
- lesions or wounds on the branches / stalks and sometimes at the base of trees
- dieback of leaves which become dry and blackened
- small white fruiting bodies growing on ash leaf stalks
- staining of the wood under the bark

For more information, including how to recognise the disease, visit [Forest Research](#).

See also the photographs at the end of this document.

Ash dieback is widespread across the UK so it is not possible to control the spread; the emphasis now is about managing the impacts of the disease.

"It will not be 'business as usual' and will create individual and corporate risks"
DEFRA 2018.

What you should do

Find out where your ash trees are. If you have a grounds maintenance Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the county council, you should have an up-to-date tree survey. This consists of a map showing where all the trees are which are numbered. The numbering correlates to the accompanying schedule. Trees called '*Fraxinus*' are ash trees and it is these you need to identify. If your survey was recent, it is likely that you will have been informed of the potential for ash dieback and the need to monitor those particular trees.

Regardless of the SLA survey, if you have an ash tree or trees growing on or adjacent to your school grounds you must act promptly to manage the potential risk.

Under civil and criminal law, the owner or occupier of land on which a tree stands has a legal responsibility with respect to the maintenance of that tree. The civil law gives rise to duties and potential liabilities to pay damages in the event of a breach of those duties. The criminal law gives rise to the risk of prosecution in the event of an infringement. To keep tree stock healthy and risks at an acceptable level, trees are assets that must be inspected at regular frequencies, maintained on an ongoing basis, e.g. the canopies managed, and in some cases felled if they are deemed dangerous.

If you do not have a Service Level Agreement with the county council for tree inspections, you must ensure such inspections take place and be at a standard and frequency equivalent to that which would have been provided by the county council through an SLA. The [Arboricultural Association](#) has an approved consultant and contractor directory. If work is required, please check the standing advice for [protected species](#) before any work starts.

Be aware that ash trees with tree preservation orders (TPOs) or trees in Conservation Areas will normally still require consent for any works from the local planning authority. Contact the [district or borough](#) council tree officer for specific advice.

If some or all of your ash trees appear to have considerable dieback, e.g. more than 50% of the crown appears affected, especially near areas with full, frequent access or near buildings; safety interventions may be required.

If dieback is more limited, please monitor the trees over the coming summer. If the extent of the dieback is much worse by September, safety interventions may be required.

Although ash cannot recover from infection, some larger trees may survive for a considerable time and some may even display genetic resistance, so please do

not carry out arboricultural interventions without seeking professional advice. Pre-emptive felling of healthy ash trees is not recommended.

Please do not panic! Whilst the safety of trees is always the responsibility of the landowner or occupier, the requirement under health and safety legislation is to have a suitable and sufficient risk assessment, and to apply measures that are reasonable and practicable. More on this and the duty of care is available from the [National Tree Safety Group](#).

If you are concerned about ash trees in neighbouring properties adjacent to, or overhanging the school grounds, please inform your neighbours.

Please raise awareness amongst your students on identification of ash and symptoms / signs of the infection so they can also help monitor the condition.

You may wish to highlight the issue of ash dieback in the classroom. It could provide a very real and relevant opportunity to talk about biodiversity and plant health. If there are no ash trees on site the issue of plant health can still be discussed and students asked to be vigilant for ash dieback outside school.

If ash trees do have to be felled there are opportunities for replacement planting. See [The Tree Council](#) and [Woodland Trust](#) websites for details.

In summary

- identify and inspect your ash trees
- identify neighbouring / overhanging ash trees
- familiarise yourself with ADB signs and monitor your ash trees
- felling is likely to be needed for trees with 50%+ dieback
- inform neighbours of their duty of care

This is a live issue – further updates will follow which will have relevant contacts for reporting concerns and actions.

Further information

- [Ash dieback toolkit](#) – prepared by The Tree Council on behalf of DEFRA and Fera
- [WSCC ash dieback](#) web page
- [Forest Research](#) – identification of ADB, reporting etc.
- [National Tree Safety Group](#) – guidance on trees and public safety
- [Arboricultural Association](#) – directories of registered consultants and approved contractors
- [District and borough councils](#) – tree officer contacts
- [Highway trees](#) – reporting problems



Healthy ash leaves – ignore the chewed leaflets by leaf cutter bees! Note the very dark buds which are characteristic of ash.



Large, mature ash with very thin crown.



Withered, blackened leaf.



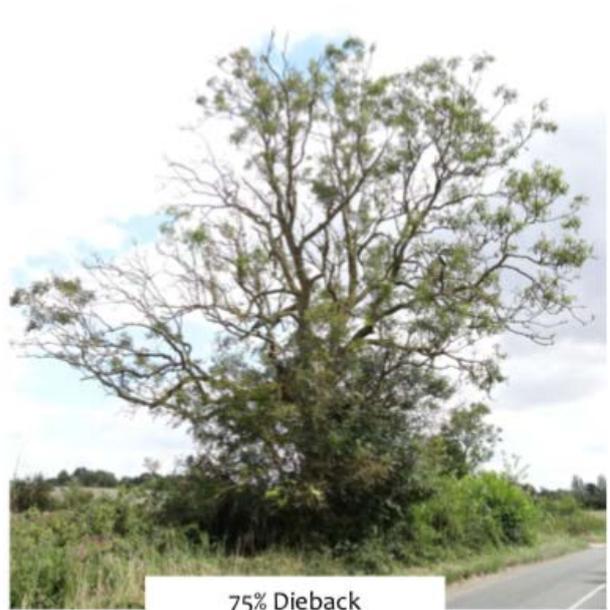
0% Dieback - Healthy Crown



25% Dieback



50% Dieback



75% Dieback

50%+ dieback is of concern.

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