

*Chalara fraxinea* / Ash dieback

# Chalara dieback

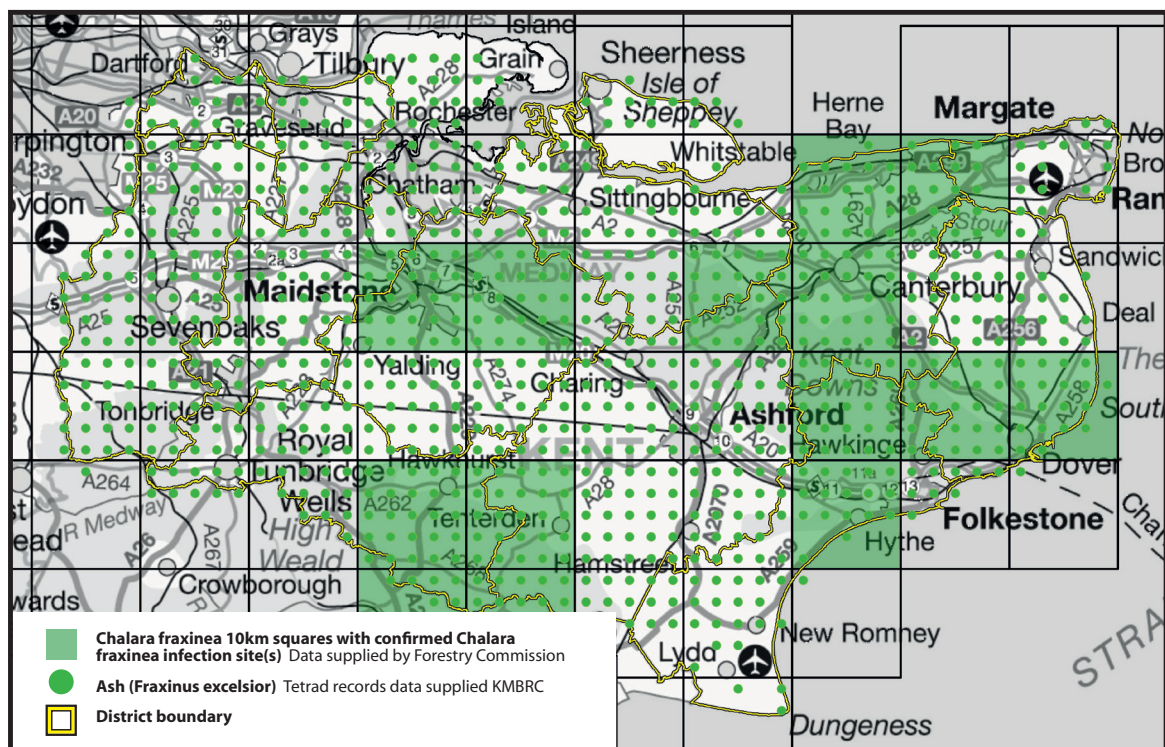
## in Kent - Advice to Schools

### What is Chalara dieback?

Chalara dieback is a serious disease of native European Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) caused by *Chalara fraxinea* (the infective phase of the fungus *Hymenoscyphus pseudoalbidus*). 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, though some exotic Ash species are also vulnerable to attack. Young trees are particularly vulnerable and succumb rapidly to infection.

### Why is this important?

Chalara dieback was first discovered in the UK last February in Buckinghamshire but since then approximately 30 sites across Kent (mainly in the east of the County) have been confirmed as infected. Ash is Kent's most widespread tree and performs a key role in the ecology and landscape of our County. It is a feature of many public open spaces and transport routes. Not only will the widespread loss of Ash impact negatively upon the biodiversity of our County but the nature of the infection results in tissue death and branch failure, which in turn, may have health and safety implications.



Map of Kent illustrating tetrad (2km square) records for Ash and current known extent of Chalara dieback infection within the County

## How to identify Chalara dieback

There are a range of symptoms which can help identify an infected tree:

- Dead or dying tops of trees and abnormal clusters of twigs resulting from epicormic re-growth;
- Wilting leaves visible in summer;
- Lesions or wounds on the branches / stalks;
- Dieback of leaves which become dry and blackened;
- Small white fruiting bodies growing on stalks of fallen Ash leaves; and
- Staining of wood under bark.

For a detailed view of the symptoms please visit the Forestry Commission website:  
[www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCPH-ADD.pdf/\\$FILE/FCPH-ADD.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCPH-ADD.pdf/$FILE/FCPH-ADD.pdf)

## What is KCC doing?

Public and private sector partners in Kent are working to ensure enhanced bio-security and vigilance against this highly destructive tree pathogen. A multi-agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group has been set up to tackle the outbreak in Kent and is chaired by KCC.

In addition, from now on KCC's Landscape Consultant, Jacobs, will be asked to collate an inventory of Ash trees in KCC maintained schools, as part of their ongoing tree inspection programme, to ensure an up-to-date record of where ash trees are located. The tree inspection programme is carried out in KCC maintained schools on an annual basis to identify any safety and maintenance works. This is considered to meet KCC's duty of care to the users of the school and other premises as well as their neighbours. KCC meets the cost of the inspection process and schools are responsible for any resultant works identified. Jacobs carries out the inspection programme and can arrange any resultant remedial work based on agreed criteria.

## What can you, as a school, do to help?

The scientific advice is that it will not be possible to eradicate Chalara, however there are steps that we can all take to help prevent it spreading. As a school you can help by:

- Identifying any cases of Chalara dieback on your school site.
- Helping to prevent the spread of the disease by practising sensible bio-security precautions.
- Raising awareness amongst your students.



## Identify possible cases of Chalara Dieback on your school site

Although KCC is carrying out an audit of trees on KCC maintained school sites, it is recommended that you undertake your own inspections within your grounds to monitor any signs of Chalara dieback. If you know you have Ash trees onsite please feel free to check them for symptoms of Chalara Dieback. If you wish to know more about how to identify an Ash tree and the symptoms of Chalara Dieback, please visit the Forestry Commission website.

You are not currently required to take any particular action if you discover infected trees on your school site, unless Defra serve you with a statutory Plant Health Notice requiring specified actions. You should, however, keep an eye on the trees' safety as the disease progresses and liaise with KCC and Jacobs on potential safety interventions that may be required.

If the disease is identified it should be reported to the Chalara helpline: 08459 335577 (open 8am – 6pm every day) or [plant.health@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:plant.health@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

You can also report any cases via the 'Tree Alert' reporting tool on the Forestry Commission website [www.forestry.gov.uk/website/treedisease.nsf/TreeDiseaseReportWeb#](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/treedisease.nsf/TreeDiseaseReportWeb#).

## Help prevent the spread of Chalara dieback

Legislation prohibits all movement of ash plants, trees and seeds within Great Britain until further notice. In the meantime please be aware that a Plant Health Order is in force to introduce emergency measures to prevent the introduction and spread of the disease.

Infection starts primarily on leaves and is progressive over time, with dieback and stem lesions usually forming in the next growing season. Fungal spores are produced on infected fallen leaves and shoots in the growing season after infection. Natural spread is by wind-blown spores from these fruiting bodies. However, spread of the disease can be exacerbated via the movement of fallen and pruned leaves, twigs and branches from one site to another. Therefore, where practical, avoid moving fallen leaves and branches off your site and seek to hasten natural decomposition through utilising on-site composting and creation of "habitat piles".

Although Ash cannot recover from infection, some larger trees may survive infection for a considerable time and some may even display a genetic resistance to the pathogen, so please do not carry out arboriculture interventions without seeking professional advice. Pre-emptive felling of healthy Ash trees is not recommended.

**Future Planting** - If new landscaping schemes are proposed incorporating Ash species, you should discuss with your contractor/consultant substitution with alternative native tree species. As a general rule, and where practical, regeneration of woodland through natural succession should be prioritised over new planting.

**Recent Planting** - If Ash has recently been planted as part of a new landscaping scheme the plants will need to be assessed carefully before the end of the defects period and the end user reminded of the need to be vigilant to the signs of the disease. Note that the disease is most easily identified in the spring and summer which may not correspond to your end of defects inspection date.

If you employ grounds contractors to maintain your trees please make them aware of this guidance and the legislative restrictions of movement of Ash, including its foliage which has been trimmed.

In addition if visiting any woodland areas, perhaps as part of a school trip, it is very important that any leaves or mud are removed from footwear, cars, bikes etc. before leaving the site.

Public information signs are available which you may want to display around your school site. If you require these free signs please contact Tony Harwood, Senior Emergency Planning Officer, Kent County Council via email: [tony.harwood@kent.gov.uk](mailto:tony.harwood@kent.gov.uk) informing him of the number of signs that you require.



Please raise awareness amongst your students on identification of Ash and symptoms of the infection so they can also help monitor the spread of Chalara dieback.

You may want to highlight the issue of Chalara dieback in the classroom. It could provide a very real and relevant opportunity to talk about biodiversity and plant health. In addition, your young people could help in identifying any cases of Chalara dieback that you may have on your site.

If you do not have any Ash trees on site you can still talk to your young people about being vigilant when visiting wooded areas, ensuring all footwear, cars, bikes, prams etc are cleaned before leaving the area.

## Useful websites

Forestry Commission

[www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara)

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)

[www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

Kent County Council

[www.kent.gov.uk](http://www.kent.gov.uk)

Defra: Interim Control Plan

[www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13843-chalara-control-plan-121206.pdf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13843-chalara-control-plan-121206.pdf)