

Religious slaughter of animals FAQs

What is religious (non-stun) slaughter?

Both the Jewish and Muslim religions have traditionally demanded that slaughter is carried out with a single cut to the throat, rather than the more widespread method of stunning with a bolt into the head before slaughter. The Jewish method of slaughter, *shechita*, does not permit stunning as Jewish religious tradition dictates animals intended for food must be healthy and uninjured at the time of slaughter.

Islamic food rules, for halal meat, can be satisfied with animals stunned before slaughter if animals do not die as a result of the stun. In fact, the majority of animals killed by the halal method are stunned beforehand. However, there is no definitive consensus and slaughter without pre-stunning does also take place.

Is slaughter without pre-stunning cruel?

There is wide scientific consensus that it is more humane to stun an animal prior to slaughter than not to do so. Many killing methods are painful for animals. Stunning is therefore necessary to induce a lack of consciousness and sensibility before, or at the same time as, the animals are killed. Animal welfare legislation in the UK therefore requires animals to be stunned before slaughter in order to minimise suffering, but an exemption is made for religious slaughter.

How common is non-stun slaughter?

The Government no longer keeps statistics on religious slaughter. However, [new data from the Food Standards Agency](#) has revealed a sharp rise in the number of animals slaughtered without pre-stunning over the last four years.

In 2013, just 15% of sheep and goats were not pre-stunned, but this rose to almost a quarter (24.4%) of all slaughters between April and June 2017.

The number of chickens slaughtered without pre-stunning has soared from 3% in 2013 to 18.5% in 2017, the FSA figures also revealed. One percent of cattle did not receive a pre-slaughter stun. In total, only 81.5% of animals were stunned prior to slaughter.

Does the NSS support a ban on non-stun slaughter?

Yes. Whilst we support the right to religious freedom, we do not think that exemptions should be made on religious grounds to animal welfare regulations which apply without exception to everyone else.

Don't religious groups have the right to freedom of religion and the right to manifest religion or belief?

Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights does provide for a right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion which includes the freedom to manifest a religion or belief in practice and observance. However, this aspect of Article 9 is a qualified right, which means that an interference with the right can be justified in certain circumstances. We maintain that the welfare of animals provides such a justification.

Do any other countries prohibit non-stun slaughter?

Yes. Slaughter without any form of stunning during the slaughter process is banned in:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- Greece*
- Iceland
- Latvia
- Liechtenstein*
- New Zealand*
- Norway
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Sweden
- Switzerland*

Laws regarding whether the animal should be stunned before or after their throats are cut vary in these countries. More detailed information is available [here](#).

*= Except poultry

What is the position of the UK Government?

The Government has said it would prefer all animals to be stunned before slaughter, but supports the exemption as it recognises the preferences of the Jewish and Muslim communities and accepts the importance which they attach to the right to slaughter animals for food in accordance with their beliefs.

Is opposition to religious slaughter discriminatory?

Advocates of religious slaughter often accuse its detractors of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim bigotry in an attempt to shut down all argument. We are mindful of occasional prejudice based [hysteria around halal food](#). Our opposition to slaughter without pre-stunning has nothing to do with religious prejudice.

Many Muslims and Jews support pre-stun slaughter on animal welfare grounds. Some halal brands make a conscious choice to only use meat from stunned animals due to animal welfare concerns. For example, halal supplier Najma states on its [website](#): "We follow the Islamic values of treating all animals with kindness and compassion. To ensure the welfare of the animals, we do use recoverable stunning prior to slaughter."

Our objection to non-stun slaughter is based on about upholding the important principle of 'one law for all' and ensuring that animals do not suffer unnecessarily and become the victims of religious privilege.

Can't those who oppose slaughter without pre-stunning simply avoid eating such meat?

Unfortunately not. There is no requirement under UK or EU law for the meat from animals slaughtered without stunning to be labelled as such. As a result, non-stun slaughtered meat is routinely being sold on the general market to unwitting members of the public.

Some parts of animals killed by Jewish ritual slaughter methods are not themselves regarded as kosher, and are therefore sold on the general market unlabelled.

Some Sikhs, Christians and Hindus believe that they must not consume meat slaughtered according to Muslim or Jewish rights. The prevalence of meat slaughtered by Jewish and Muslim methods without labelling impedes their own religious freedom.

An investigation by NSS in 2018 revealed that that around one in 12 councils provide non-stunned halal meat for school meals, reaching thousands of children across Britain. In many of these schools, there is no separate meat option for children who do not want to eat non-stunned meat. They must have a vegetarian meal instead.

A November 2018 investigation by The Times found that in several cases, schools providing only non-stunned halal meat were not informing parents of the nature of the meat and how it was slaughtered.

As long as religious groups retain the privilege of an exemption from legislation that permits slaughter without pre-stunning, we maintain it is only fair that consumers have the right to information that enables them to avoid such products if they so wish.