Massaria disease of plane trees, caused by the fungus *Splanchnonema platani*, is affecting London plane trees (*Platanus x hispanica*) in England. It is associated with branches dying back and an increased risk of failure.

**Distribution**
It was found in living plane trees in London in 2009 and Bristol more recently. In 2009 tree management teams in London working on plane began to notice large lesions and branch drop. Similar symptoms have been seen on lesions of plane trees in mainland Europe, most notably in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and parts of France.

**Impact**
London plane trees are widely planted in towns and cities as shade and amenity trees, so the presence of the disease can be a significant public safety issue for their owners; many of which are local authorities. The dead wood has to be removed before it becomes an unacceptable hazard.

**Pinkish hue**
The disease first appears as a pinkish strip on the upper surface of the branch.

**Cambium death**
Affected branches suffer death of the bark and cambium (the layer of tissue just under the bark), which can affect up to 30% of the branch circumference.

**Extending lesion**
The infection develops into a lesion extending from a union with the parent branch or stem. These lesions can extend many metres, but because they affect the upper part of the branch, infection can be difficult to see from the ground.

**Wood decay**
Lesions are associated with wood decay, characterised by soft rot, often resulting in the death and/or the fracture of the branch. Arboriculturalists with London’s Royal Parks have seen branch failure within three months of the symptoms first becoming noticeable, but branch failure can occur after one or more years.

**If you think you have spotted this disease in a tree, then report it through the Forestry Commission’s online Tree Alert form:** [forestry.gov.uk/treedet](http://forestry.gov.uk/treedet)

There is no available treatment for the disease apart from removing diseased branches before they become an unacceptable safety hazard. People who work on plane trees can help to minimise the rate of spread by practising good biosecurity.

**Keep it clean**
Don’t give pests and diseases an easy ride.

- **Think kit**
  Clean and disinfect tools and equipment, and wash and dry ropes before using them to work on another tree.

- **Think transport**
  Remove any build up of soil or organic material from vehicles and machinery before moving on to a new site.

- **Think trees**
  Destroy all infected material through incineration or deep burial, either on site or at a licensed waste handling facility.