

FACTSHEET

Veterinary Services

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

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Foot-and-mouth disease Q's and A's

Q: What is foot-and-mouth disease (FMD)?

A: FMD is a highly contagious and economically devastating disease of cattle and swine. It also affects sheep, goats, deer, and other cloven-hooved ruminants. Many affected animals recover, but the disease leaves them debilitated. FMD causes severe losses in the production of meat and milk. Because it spreads widely and rapidly and because it has grave economic as well as physical consequences, FMD is one of the animal diseases that livestock owners dread most. The disease does not affect food safety or humans.

Q: What are the potential economic ramifications of an FMD outbreak in the United States?

A: An FMD outbreak in the United States could potentially cost the U.S. livestock industry billions of dollars in losses in the first year.

Q: Can people get the disease from animals?

A: It is not believed to readily affect humans. There was one recorded case in Britain in 1966. The effects of the disease for that person were similar to flu with some blisters. The disease has no implications for the human food chain. People, however, can spread the virus to animals because it can remain in human nasal passages for as long as 28 hours.

Q: How do you get rid of foot-and-mouth disease?

A: The virus can be killed off by heat, low humidity, or some disinfectants. It is only rarely fatal, although it is more likely to kill very young animals. There is no cure for the disease, and it usually runs its course in 2 or 3 weeks with most animals recovering, although some animals take up to 6 months to fully recover.

Q: If most animals don't die, why go to such great lengths to eradicate it?

A: The disease is highly contagious with nearly 100 percent of exposed animals becoming infected. If the disease became widespread in any country there would be disastrous economic consequences. For example, the most serious effects of the disease in dairy cattle are loss of milk and yield.

Q: What is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) doing to protect the United States from foot-and-mouth disease?

A: In order to protect U.S. livestock from the introduction of FMD, USDA implemented an interim rule on February 21, prohibiting or restricting the importation into the United States of live swine and ruminants and any fresh swine or ruminant meat (chilled or frozen) or products from Great Britain or Northern Ireland. USDA's FMD policy has been to be proactive and preventative. As a result, the interim rule is effective retroactively. Products dated after January 14 are not permitted entry into the United States. This rule has not yet been published in the *Federal Register*.

Q: What is USDA doing to prevent travelers from bringing FMD into the United States?

A: There is no change in the regulation regarding U.S. surveillance measures of travelers for FMD. However, ports of entry have been notified to enhance surveillance of travelers coming from Europe, particularly the United Kingdom (UK) because that area is now considered to be at high risk for FMD.

Q: What should travelers do if they are planning to visit a farm or are in contact with livestock while abroad?

A: All international travelers must state on their Customs declaration form whether or not they have been on a farm or in contact with livestock and if they are bringing any meat or dairy products from their travels back with them. APHIS officials will inspect the baggage of all travelers who indicate they have been on a farm or in contact with livestock. Any soiled footwear must be disinfected with detergent

and bleach. If travelers are around livestock in the UK and they have livestock at home in the United States, they should avoid contact with their animals for 5 days after returning. In addition, soiled clothing must be washed and disinfected prior to returning to the United States.

Q: Can travelers bring animal products back to the United States from Europe?

A: Any ruminant or swine products (cattle, sheep, goats, deer, and other cloven-hooved animals included), with the exception of hard cheeses and canned products with a shelf life, will be confiscated.

Q: How can farmers support USDA in its efforts to prevent FMD in the United States?

A: As always, farmers can support U.S. efforts against FMD by watching for excessive salivating, lameness, and other signs of FMD in their herd and immediately reporting any unusual or suspicious signs of disease to their veterinarian, State or Federal animal disease control officials, or their county agricultural agent. Garbage feeders are encouraged to fully cook their feed before giving it to livestock.

Additional Information

For more information about FMD, contact:

USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services
Emergency Programs
4700 River Road, Unit 41
Riverdale, MD 20737-1231
Telephone (301) 734-8073
Fax (301) 734-7817

Current information on animal diseases and suspected outbreaks is also available on the Internet at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov>.

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