

Foot And Mouth Disease Update

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The information in this fact sheet was compiled through a coordinated project of University of Wisconsin-Extension, Cooperative Extension; Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Division of Animal Health; University of Wisconsin-Madison – College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and School of Veterinary Medicine; and U.S. Department of Agriculture, APHIS, Veterinary Services.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is Foot and Mouth Disease?

A. Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) is a severe, highly contagious viral disease of cattle, sheep and swine. It also affects other cloven-hoofed animals. An animal with the disease will develop a fever and get blisters in the mouth, between the hooves and on teats. Infected animals may survive but the disease leaves them in very poor health, and it causes losses in production of meat and milk. The potential economic losses from an outbreak of the disease in the U.S. would be catastrophic.

Q. Both Foot and Mouth Disease and Mad Cow Disease are reported in Britain. Are these two diseases related?

A. No. Mad Cow Disease, the common name for Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), is a completely different disease from FMD. BSE is a brain disease that causes behavior changes and physical deterioration. It is not contagious, but it spreads when animals eat feed that contains nerve tissue from animals that were infected. Such feeding practices are illegal in the U.S.

Q. Do we have Foot and Mouth Disease or BSE in the U.S.

A. No. The United States has been free of Foot and Mouth Disease since 1929. BSE has never been diagnosed in the U.S.

Q. Can people get Foot and Mouth Disease? How about pets?

A. Humans and animals that don't have cloven hooves (dogs, cats, horses) don't get Foot and Mouth Disease. However, a pot-bellied pig is susceptible.

Q. Can people spread this disease?

A. They can, although this is far less of a threat than transmission caused by animal-to-animal contact. Nevertheless, one of the big worries about Foot and Mouth Disease is that the virus might be carried from place to place on people's shoes and clothing or on vehicles and equipment.

Q. What precautions should people who have visited an area infected with Foot and Mouth Disease take when returning to the U.S?

A. Anyone returning to the US from an infected area should take the following precautions:

- Stay away from animals with cloven hooves for at least one week.
- Wash or dry clean all clothing taken on the trip. Add bleach (one ounce per gallon) to laundry water and dry the clothes completely on a hot setting in a clothes dryer.

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- Surface clean and then wipe all luggage, cameras, etc with a solution of bleach and water (one ounce bleach per gallon) or a solution of one part white vinegar and one part water.
- Clean and then disinfect footwear worn on the trip. Do not rinse off the disinfecting solution. Do not wear these shoes or boots around cloven-hoofed animals for two months after the visit. Some people recommend destroying footwear that may have been contaminated.

Q. What is the federal government doing to prevent the spread of Foot and Mouth Disease into the United States?

A. The government has prohibited import of all animals and animal products and used farm equipment from high-risk countries. The U.S. also has increased personnel and surveillance at ports of entry, tightened regulatory enforcement, strengthened federal, state, and industry coordination, accelerated research, implemented education campaigns and sent experts to Great Britain to help with containment efforts.

Q. Are meat and dairy products imported from countries where there is Food and Mouth Disease?

A. The U.S. has banned all European imports of meat and dairy products to avoid the spread of Foot and Mouth Disease. However, from a food safety perspective, meat and animal products that might be contaminated with Foot and Mouth Disease do not pose a health risk to humans.

Q. I heard that casein and other milk protein concentrates (MPCs) used in cheese making are imported from Europe. Can MPCs spread FMD?

A. Imported milk protein concentrates (MPC) are used in making certain “non-standardized” cheeses and cheese foods, but cannot legally be used in making cheeses for which the Food and Drug Administration has published standards of identity. MPC is not produced in the U.S. The principal sources of MPC imports are New Zealand and the European Community. There is no scientific evidence linking the spread of either BSE or Foot and Mouth Disease to manufactured dairy products. Furthermore, since the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in Europe, the U.S. government requires that MPCs be held for 30 days – long enough for any virus to die off – before being allowed into the U.S.

Q. What would happen if there were an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in the U.S.?

A. The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection have a coordinated emergency plan that would go into effect. The plan outlines the responsibilities of various state and federal officials for identifying the outbreak area, setting up quarantine zones and containing the disease.

Q. I heard there is a vaccine available? Why don't they just vaccinate the animals to stop this disease?

A. Animals that have been vaccinated against Foot and Mouth Disease may not become ill, but they can still carry and spread the virus. The federal policy is to eradicate FMD and not to vaccinate. There are many economic and trade advantages to being certified as a nation free of Foot and Mouth Disease. Using the vaccine might limit the spread of the disease, but U.S. farmers and ranchers could no longer export their products or animals to countries certified as Foot and Mouth Disease-free.