



USMEF Factsheet

Foot-and-Mouth Disease

August 2005

Summary

There have been no cases of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in the United States since 1929. Despite a recent devastating outbreak in Britain, in 2001, this highly contagious viral disease is rare in industrialised countries but endemic in developing countries.

Background

FMD does not affect humans but has devastating effects on animals with cloven hooves, such as cattle, hogs, sheep, goats and deer.

FMD is a highly contagious virus and can be spread by movement of infected animals, movement of contaminated vehicles, and by contaminated facilities used to hold animals. It also can infect animals through contaminated hay or feedstuffs and if susceptible animals drink from a common water source. According to the Office International des Epizooties (OIE), infected animals with no apparent symptoms can spread FMD to other countries.

There are seven types of the FMD virus, all of which have similar symptoms. Immunity to one type does not protect animals from other types. The average incubation period for FMD is between three and eight days, but can be up to two weeks in some cases. The disease is rarely fatal but may kill very young animals. Animals that survive are often debilitated and experience severe loss in milk or meat production.

People who come in contact with the virus can spread it to animals through clothing, footwear or other equipment and materials. The virus can remain in the human nasal passages for as long as 28 hours. The virus can also spread through the air.

Economic Impact

If FMD were to occur in the U.S., the degree of economic impact would depend on how quickly the disease was identified and effective control measures put in place. If it was controlled quickly and eradicated, as was the case with the last outbreak in the U.S. in 1929, the damage could be small, but if the disease became widespread, the cost would run to billions of dollars. The most serious effects would result from the necessity of destroying animals in order to eradicate the disease and the temporary halt of meat and live animal exports.

Prevention

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regularly monitors for any disease among U.S. cattle herds and takes aggressive steps to prevent FMD from spreading to the U.S. whenever there is an outbreak in other countries.

As part of an ongoing surveillance program, the USDA conducts hundreds of field inquiries each year in an effort to detect animal diseases that might affect livestock.

When there is an outbreak of FMD in another country, the U.S. temporarily prohibits the import of animals and animal products from that country.

The government also prohibits travelers from carrying into the United States any agricultural products, particularly animal products that could spread FMD. Passengers are required to



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identify any farm contact to Customs and USDA officials, and all baggage is subject to inspection.

After the 2001 outbreak in Britain and other European Union countries, the USDA established an emergency operations center to coordinate communications, answer technical questions, and provide consumer/traveler information about FMD and other related issues. Toll-free numbers include: Technical questions - 1-800-601-9327; Consumer/Traveler Hotline: 1-866-SAFEGUARD.

The USDA has more than 450 veterinary officials throughout the country that partner with state and local agriculture officials to ensure appropriate protections are in place to prevent the entry of and potentially detect FMD in the United States. USDA has been coordinating and meeting regularly with appropriate federal, state, industry and university officials since the recent EU FMD cases were discovered. These groups include regional USDA officials, Customs, Defense, state agriculture and veterinary officials, university experts, and airline/travel industry representatives.

Current information on foot-and-mouth disease and traveler questions and answers are available on the Internet at <http://www.usda.gov/>.

Key Points

There have been no FMD Cases in the United States since 1929.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. livestock industry are ready with an action plan should an FMD case occur.

FMD is not hazardous to human health.

For More Information

A considerable amount of information on FMD is now available on the internet:

A [USMEF Background](#) is available at the federation's Web site, www.usmef.org.

The [Office International des Epizooties](#) (OIE) has important information on FMD.

The [National Cattlemen's Beef Association](#) maintains up-to-date information on FMD at its Web site.

The USDA's [National Animal Disease Welfare](#) Web site has information on FMD.