

Protecting America From Foot-and-Mouth Disease and Other High-Consequence Livestock Diseases

As part of our mission to safeguard American agriculture, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) works to ensure the continued health of our Nation's livestock and poultry. These efforts include protecting livestock and poultry from the introduction of "high-consequence" foreign animal diseases and pests that do not currently exist in the United States. If introduced here, they pose a severe threat to U.S. animal health and, in some cases, the economy and human health, too.

To help keep livestock and poultry healthy, APHIS works every day to:

- keep high-consequence diseases and pests out of the country;
- educate producers about the signs to watch for and what to do if they see them; and
- look for, detect, and eliminate these diseases if they occur in the United States.

Our safeguarding activities are critical to keeping high-consequence animal diseases and pests out of the country, especially since outbreaks of one of the most serious diseases—foot-and-mouth disease (FMD)—occur regularly in other parts of the world.

What Is FMD?

FMD is a severe and highly contagious viral disease. The FMD virus causes illness in cows, pigs, sheep, goats, deer, and other animals with divided hooves. It does not affect horses, dogs, or cats. FMD is not a public health or food safety threat. It is also not related to hand, foot, and mouth disease, a common childhood illness caused by a different virus.

Animals with FMD typically have a fever and blisters on the tongue and lips, in and around the mouth, on the mammary glands, and around the hooves. These blisters, called vesicles, pop and turn into red areas called erosions. Pain and discomfort from the vesicles and erosions lead to other signs of illness such as depression, anorexia, excessive salivation, lameness, and reluctance

to move or stand. Most affected animals will not die from FMD, but the disease leaves them weakened and unable to produce meat and milk the way they did before.

FMD causes production losses and hardships for farmers and ranchers. It also has serious impacts on livestock trade—a single detection of FMD will likely stop international trade completely for a period of time. Since the disease can spread widely and rapidly and has grave economic consequences, FMD is one of the animal diseases livestock owners dread most.

FMD is caused by a virus. The virus survives in living tissue and in the breath, saliva, urine, and other excretions of infected animals. It can also survive in contaminated materials and the environment for several months under the right conditions. There are 7 known types and more than 60 subtypes of the FMD virus. Immunity to one type does not protect an animal against other types or subtypes.

FMD can spread when infected animals bring the virus into physical contact with susceptible animals (i.e., divided hoof animals). While the United States eradicated the disease here in 1929, it is currently found in parts of Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America.

Keeping FMD Out of the United States

FMD is one of the most difficult animal diseases to control. Because the disease occurs in many parts of the world, there is always a chance of its introduction into the United States. APHIS vigilantly and continuously monitors for FMD worldwide by stationing veterinarians overseas to help other countries control and eradicate the disease, which reduces the risk of it spreading to the United States.

Many animals and animal byproducts from areas known to be affected with FMD are subject to import restrictions or are prohibited entry into this country. APHIS works directly with Federal partners, including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection, to screen cargo and prevent travelers from bringing any products of concern into the United States. Travelers must declare all food items and materials of plant or animal origin in their possession upon entry, as well as recent visits to farms and livestock facilities prior to their arrival back into the country. Failure to do so may result in delays and fines—up to \$1,000 for a first offense and potentially as high as \$50,000.

APHIS also works with the U.S. Armed Forces to make sure military vehicles and equipment are properly cleaned and disinfected before their return to the United States from international duty.

In addition, APHIS and other Federal, State, and Tribal animal health officials work with private veterinarians to monitor domestic livestock for FMD. We have response plans in place that we can quickly activate if the disease is found in the United States.

Keeping Out Other High-Consequence Animal Diseases

APHIS uses the same types of activities to prevent both FMD and other high-consequence animal diseases from entering the United States. These other diseases include, but are not limited to: African swine fever, African horse sickness, classical swine fever, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, heartwater, virulent Newcastle disease, and Rift Valley fever.

How You Can Help

To successfully keep FMD and other high-consequence animal diseases and pests out of the United States, we depend on the support and cooperation of many people—livestock and supporting industry members; veterinarians; State, Tribal, and local government officials; other Federal agencies; and the general public. Below are some important ways you can help protect against an FMD introduction.

Report concerns. We encourage livestock owners, livestock transport and slaughter personnel, and private veterinarians to report any unusual animal health conditions to Federal, State, Tribal, or local animal health officials. This is especially important if the animals in question have had contact with other animals at locations like livestock markets, feedlots, or fairgrounds.

Be careful what you pack. When traveling outside the United States, make sure you do not bring back any prohibited food items and other products or dirty footwear or clothing that could present a risk of moving the FMD virus or other disease agents. If you travel overseas, be certain that your luggage, packages, and mail are free of any prohibited meats, dairy products, and other at-risk materials before bringing or sending them to the United States.

If in doubt, check “yes”! Upon return to the United States, travelers to foreign countries should note on the U.S. Customs Declaration form any visits to farms, ranches, or other areas where livestock are raised or kept. Visits to zoos, circuses, fairs, and other facilities and events where animals are exhibited also need to be noted. Report these types of visits on the form by answering “yes” to the following questions:

- 11-D. Are you bringing with you soil or have you been on a farm/ranch/pasture outside the United States?
- 12. Have you or any family members traveling with you been in close proximity of (such as touching or handling) livestock outside the United States?

Follow a “5-day” rule. If you visited a farm or had any contact with livestock on your trip, avoid all contact with livestock, zoo animals, or wildlife for 5 days after your return to the United States.

Keep dirt away and separate pets from livestock. Dogs and cats cannot become infected with FMD virus. However, if you are returning to the United States with pet dogs or cats that have had contact with livestock or areas frequented by livestock, make sure your pet’s feet, fur, and bedding are free of any excessive dirt or mud. Pet bedding should not contain straw, hay, or other natural bedding. Your pet should also be bathed as soon as it reaches its final destination and be kept separate and apart from all livestock for at least 5 days after returning to the United States.

Your participation in FMD safeguarding efforts is vital. By taking these basic precautions, either as a traveler or part of the livestock community, you can help prevent FMD from being introduced in the United States—or if it is, reduce the time and money needed to wipe it out.

Learn More

For more information about FMD, contact APHIS Veterinary Services’ District Offices at 1-866-536-7593.

Current information on animal diseases and disease outbreaks is also available on our website at www.aphis.usda.gov.