

What is FMD?

Foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) is an extremely contagious animal disease that affects cattle, swine, sheep, goats, deer and other cloven-hooved animals.

The disease causes fever and painful blisters on the tongue, lips, mouths and hooves of affected animals. While the disease is not fatal, it is debilitating and severely impacts meat and milk production.

FMD is not a new disease. There are references to the disease in ancient Greece and Rome.

How is FMD spread?

FMD can be spread from one animal to another through ordinary contact, or by air or water. If a person has come into contact with a sick animal, that person also may carry the virus to other livestock on shoes, clothing or hands.

In addition, uncooked meat derived from livestock with FMD can actually spread the disease to livestock (but not to humans). It also can be spread when susceptible animals are held in facilities that previously held sick animals or when susceptible animals are transported in contaminated vehicles.

Because the disease is so highly contagious, the U.S. takes steps, such as disinfecting the shoes of people traveling to the U.S. from countries currently affected by FMD and who have been on farms in an effort to protect American herds.

Does FMD exist in the U.S.?

FMD does not exist in the U.S. and has not existed since 1929. Because the U.S. has one of the most comprehensive disease prevention and eradication programs anywhere in the world, we also have one of the healthiest livestock populations.

What nations are currently affected by FMD?

The disease has never been fully eradicated from

the world's livestock populations and has been a particularly pervasive problem in some regions of Africa, South America and Asia. North America, Central America, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Chile and many European nations are considered free of FMD.

What steps does the U.S. take when FMD is detected in another country?

When FMD is detected in another country, the U.S. immediately ceases animal and meat imports from that country or affected regions of the country. Once a country loses its FMD-free status, it may take years to get it back.

Why is the disease so difficult to contain in livestock?

The disease is difficult to contain for two reasons. First, it is highly contagious and spread in a variety of ways. Second, because its symptoms often are not severe, a livestock producer may not immediately recognize it in animals. For example, a sheep with FMD may limp due to blisters on its hooves. But the limp may not be severe enough to attract attention immediately.

However, all livestock producers in countries with and without FMD are monitoring livestock populations very carefully now to prevent the disease and contain it rapidly if it occurs.

Does FMD pose a risk to humans?

Under normal circumstances, FMD cannot be transmitted to humans either from livestock or from meat derived from animals infected with FMD. In a few rare cases, humans that have been massively exposed to the virus, most often through close contact with infected animals, have developed a very mild version of the disease. The last known human case was in the 1960s. All humans that have developed FMD under these

extreme circumstances have fully recovered.

Does cooking destroy the virus that causes FMD?

Cooking meat will destroy the virus that causes FMD. That is why some cooked products from countries with FMD are permitted in the U.S. It is important to understand that cooking helps control the spread of the disease from meat to livestock. But it does not “protect” humans from the disease since, except under extreme circumstances, humans cannot get the disease.

Remember, however: proper cooking of raw meat is always important in protecting against bacteria that can be found on raw animal and agricultural products.

Is there any relationship between FMD and the human illness Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease?

The only significant similarity between these diseases is the name. Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease is the nickname for a virus called Coxsackie Virus. The virus most often causes an uncomfortable illness among children and is frequently spread in schools and daycare centers.

Helpful Links

American Meat Institute
<http://www.meatami.com>
<http://www.meatsafety.org>

World Organization for Animal Health
<http://www.oie.int>

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
<http://www.aphis.usda.gov>

United Kingdom Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/index.htm>

USDA FMD Hotline
800-601-9327