

## **Foot and Mouth Disease**

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**Foot and Mouth disease (FMD) is not a human pathogen and will not infect normal people. The last case of foot and mouth disease in the US was in 1929.** Foot and mouth disease is a production disease that results in poor gains and reduced milk production in cattle, sheep, goats and hogs. Foot and mouth disease (FMD) is a virus infection of cloven-footed animals that is highly contagious. It causes sores in the mouth, and nose, and on the feet and teats of cattle, sheep, and pigs. The virus does not appear to infect horses. Foot and mouth disease occurs in most of the major livestock producing countries of the world, except North American, Central America, Australia, and New Zealand. Europe and Great Britain are generally free for periods of time but over the years have experienced several outbreaks. The last outbreak in England occurred in 1968.

**The disease seldom results in death of cattle but often causes severe loss of production because the animals do not move or eat due to the pain.** The reduction in weight gains and milk production are severe. The large numbers of dead cattle and sheep you see on the news from England are animals that were killed by regulatory officials in England in an attempt to prevent the spread of this highly contagious disease. Once an animal is infected, it will remain a carrier and may spread the virus for several months. To control the infection, all cattle, goats, pigs and sheep that may have had contact with infected animals are killed. There are several strains of the virus that occur worldwide. Vaccines are used in some parts of the world to reduce the loss of production by decreasing the clinical signs of disease, but vaccines will not prevent the spread of Foot and Mouth disease. Once an animal is infected, it will take only 1 to 7 days before it will show signs of the disease. The clinical signs of the disease are fever, depression, off-feed, excessive salivation and drooling. The feet may also be affected and the cattle will be lame. Ulcerations of the mouth and tongue are common lesions. (See pictures)

The US eliminated FMD in 1929. Mexico eliminated FMD in 1959. We were able to control the spread of FMD from Mexico into the US during 1929 to 1954 so we should be able to stop the current epidemic from entering the US. Someone bringing in uncooked meat recently reintroduced FMD into England; the table scraps from FMD infected meat were not cooked before it was feed to pigs. Infected pigs went undiscovered for weeks and disease spread rapidly to several areas of Great Britain. The virus is easily transmitted by contact with infected animals, in the air, or by pigs eating infected meat. Humans do not get the disease but may mechanically act to spread the virus from infected animals to non-infected animals. The virus can survive on the hair, skin and in the nasal passages of people for several days (3-5) and may survive on muddy shoes for 5 days.

We sometime complain about regulations that make it difficult to sell or buy cattle from other countries but the USDA has done an exceptional job of preventing the re-introduction of FMD into the US. **If FMD is somehow introduced into the US, everyone is alerted to the signs and an immediate response can be formulated.** Over the next few months, we may hear of several cases of suspected FMD in swine. As part of an ongoing surveillance program, the USDA conducts hundreds of field inquiries year in an effort to detect foreign animal diseases. Swine do get two diseases that can look a lot like FMD and it takes special testing to tell the difference. If it is caught early, FMD will be confined to a small area and can be more easily dealt with. The problem with the current FMD outbreak in England is that it was allowed to spread before a diagnosis was made.

**If anyone travels to an area, where there are infected animals you should use disposable shoes and clothing, shower extensively after the visit and before traveling back to the US, and preferably stay away from any farm animals for at least 5 days.**

Drooling cow



Ulcer on calf's mouth

