

## Questions and Answers: Malignant Catarrhal Fever

On April 17, 2008, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa, confirmed the presence of the wildebeest type of malignant catarrhal fever (MCF) in a heifer recently purchased from a mixed-use operation in Texas that died showing clinical signs of the disease.

### **Q. What is MCF?**

**A.** MCF is a disease caused by a herpesvirus, and two types of herpesvirus are known to cause the disease—a sheep-associated type and a wildebeest-associated type. These animals carry the disease asymptomatically. Cattle can contract both types of the disease; both types cause high fatality rates in cattle.

### **Q. What is a mixed-use operation?**

**A.** A mixed use operation keeps animals for a number of purposes that can include, breeding, hunting, and exhibition.

### **Q. Does MCF affect human health?**

**A.** MCF poses no threat to human health.

### **Q. Have the affected animals entered into the food chain?**

**A.** The suspect cattle from the herd of origin were for breeding purposes and the information gathered thus far in the investigation confirms that they have not entered the food chain. Even if infected animals were to enter into the food chain, MCF poses no threat to human health and cannot be transmitted to people.

### **Q. Does MCF spread among cattle?**

**A.** No. MCF is not a contagious disease in cattle. Infected cows can, however, pass the virus to their offspring.

### **Q. Can MCF affect animals other than cattle and wildebeest?**

**A.** In addition to cattle and wildebeest, MCF can affect deer and elk. The disease has been found previously in domestic pigs, giraffes, and certain species of antelopes.

### **Q. How did the cattle get the disease?**

**A.** The disease appears to have spread to the cattle on the mixed-use operation in Texas from exposure to captive wildebeests on the same property.

### **Q. Is USDA tracing the affected animals?**

**A.** USDA foreign animal disease diagnosticians and State animal health officials are conducting an epidemiological investigation. Part of the investigation is the tracing of all sale records associated with the affected animals from the mixed-use operation in Texas.

### **Q. Does USDA know where the cattle were shipped?**

**A.** USDA has confirmed that approximately 130 breeding heifers from the affected herd have been shipped to Illinois, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Because cattle do not transmit the disease, the interstate movement of the cattle does not pose a risk for dissemination of the disease.

### **Q. How do you know that disease is not more widespread—is it possible that other animals have been affected?**

**A.** Texas animal health officials have placed a quarantine on the entire mixed-use operation to prevent any further movement. Additionally, USDA's foreign animal disease diagnosticians and State animal health officials are conducting an epidemiological investigation that will help determine which animals on the operation may have been exposed to the wildebeest virus. Information on any previous movement of exposed animals from the mixed-use operation in Texas will be provided to affected States as it becomes available. Because cattle do not transmit the disease, the interstate movement of the cattle does not pose a risk for dissemination of the disease.

### **Q. What is going to happen to the affected cattle?**

**A.** State officials have placed all of the cattle from the herd on hold. USDA is working with the States and owners to depopulate the heifers. The owners will receive indemnity for the loss of their animals.

### **Q. If MCF can't spread between cattle, why would the exposed heifers be depopulated?**

**A.** While MCF does not spread among cattle, it can decrease the value of the cattle and cause economic losses to the farmers. Moreover, exposed cattle can test negative for the disease and then fall ill and test

positive later in life. The disease can also pass from a cow to its offspring.

**Q. Has there ever been a case of MCF in the United States?**

**A.** There have been isolated incidents of wildebeest-associated MCF involving zoo animals dating back to the 1970's and one case involving a domestic cow in 1994. The sheep-associated disease is considered endemic, or occurs commonly, in the United States.

**Q. Will the detection of MCF affect this country's trading status?**

**A.** Wildebeest-associated MCF is not classified as a disease that has the potential for serious, rapid spread, or public health consequences. While it is a reportable animal disease under World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) guidelines, OIE does not recommend any actions based on MCF.

**A.** The OIE requires member nations to report any occurrence of certain transmissible animal diseases in order to successfully monitor animal health on a worldwide bases.

---

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W. , Washington , D.C. 20250-9410 , or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

**Q. Why does the OIE require reporting of MCF?**