



## FOOD SAFETY FACT SHEET

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) or “Mad Cow Disease”

The following information will help you to become familiar with food safety issues pertaining to “Mad Cow Disease” or BSE.

*There has been a lot of news recently about BSE infected beef in Europe. This fact sheet is designed to give you some basic information about BSE and how you can protect yourself and your family. It is important to know US military dining facilities, commissaries, BX/IPX/NEX facilities and MWR activities sell only beef and beef products purchased from US approved sources. No European beef is used in these facilities, and you are not at risk when consuming beef from these sources.*

#### **WHAT IS BSE OR “MAD COW DISEASE”?**

BSE, also called Mad Cow Disease, causes spongy degeneration of the brain in cows and is fatal within weeks to months from onset of symptoms. BSE is one of a group of diseases called Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE), which infects several different species of animals including sheep, deer, mink and humans.

BSE was first diagnosed in cattle in the United Kingdom in 1986. Since that time, the disease has been found in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland. There have been no cases of BSE found in the United States.

#### **WHY IS BSE IMPORTANT?**

In 1996, a new form of the human disease called variant Creutzfeldt-Jacob Disease (vCJD) was diagnosed in a group of people in the UK and later in France and Ireland. The time from infection to onset of disease is uncertain, but can be anywhere from 10 to 20 years. The agent causing this new disease appears very similar to the BSE agent. Some researchers think that eating meat from cows infected with BSE may have caused this disease. However, this is still not a proven fact.

#### **WHAT IS MY RISK OF EXPOSURE TO BSE?**

Public health control measures have been recommended by the World Health Organization to prevent BSE-infected meat from entering the human food chain. BSE has not been found in the United States, thus meat from US

sources is considered free of BSE. US military dining facilities, commissaries, BX/PX/NEX facilities and MWR activities sell only beef and beef products purchased from US approved sources. No European beef is used in these facilities.

Milk, milk products, poultry and pork are not believed to pose any risk for transmitting the BSE agent.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the current risk of getting vCJD from eating beef (muscle meat) and beef products produced from cattle in Europe is extremely small (fewer than 1 case per 10 billion servings). Although the risk is small, it is important for you to know what you can do to avoid the risk. Things you can do are:

- 1) Avoid beef and beef products from European markets including Kantenes, Mensas, fest vendors and off installation markets.
- 2) Select solid pieces of beef muscle meat instead of beef products such as burgers and sausages.

For more information please refer to:

<http://www.chppmeur.amedd.army.mil>

#### REFERENCES:

1. Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy. USDA, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, APHIS Web.  
<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/>
2. Emerging and Other Communicable Diseases (EMC) World Health Organization Consultation Report, March 1997.
3. WHO Fact Sheet #180 and #11.  
<http://www.who.int/>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Infectious Diseases, Travelers Health Website.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/travel.madcow>