



# FACT SHEET

## Foot and Mouth Disease

Foot and mouth disease is an animal disease and not a human health threat.

US personnel living abroad should not transport meat and meat by-products out of countries where the disease is present.

### WHAT IS FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE?

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) is a viral disease of cloven-hoofed animals (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, deer and antelope). Carnivores and horses are resistant to the disease but can be carriers of the virus. FMD is characterized by blistering lesions, mostly on the feet, tongue, mouth and teats of infected animals. Most animals recover, but they remain debilitated. The hedgehog may serve as a reservoir of the disease in nature.

### WHY IS FMD IMPORTANT?

Foot and mouth disease is the most feared disease of livestock in the world. It is feared not because of any threat to human health, but because of its effect on a country's agricultural industry and world trade. Countries that report the disease are severely restricted in their ability to export livestock products.

FMD is devastating to the agricultural industry due to its effect on the production of milk and meat. During the long course of the disease the blisters become painful ulcers, and animals stop eating and producing milk. Most animals survive the disease but never regain the same level of productivity.

### HOW IS FMD TRANSMITTED?

This virus is highly contagious among livestock and spreads quickly from one animal to another. It can be transferred from one farm to another on equipment, vehicles, clothing, by pets, wild animals and birds, and may be carried considerable distances by the wind. The disease has a very short incubation period with lesions appearing in less than 48 hours. Because of the wide range of species this disease infects, it is very difficult to control. A policy of quarantine, slaughter and livestock vaccination is the only way to control its spread. FMD was eradicated from the US in 1929. It is present in several countries in Europe, but active surveillance efforts are in effect to eliminate it.

### CAN I CATCH FMD?

FMD is not a threat to public health, but there are rare reports of human infections.

Historically, only laboratory and slaughterhouse workers who contacted blister fluid or large concentrations of the virus have become infected. Infected workers experienced minor skin lesions and mild cold symptoms. Very few human cases have been reported compared to the large number of animals infected. There have been no human cases of food-borne transmission reported. The animal disease should not be confused with the human disease called Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD). HFMD does not come from animals with FMD.

### WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF FMD?

In order to protect livestock in the US from FMD, strict importation laws are in place. These laws prohibit anyone from bringing any type of livestock products into the US. For people living in countries where the disease is reported, any meat, sausage, butter or other dairy product should not be transported out of the country. This includes pet products that contain meat or animal by-products such as pigs' ears or rawhide. US personnel living overseas should contact their local veterinary authority for health certification prior to shipping their pets.

For specific information on animal import and export limitations please refer to:

[www.maff.gov.uk](http://www.maff.gov.uk)

### REFERENCES:

1. Foot and Mouth Disease, USDA, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service fact sheet, July 1998.  
[www.aphis.usda.gov](http://www.aphis.usda.gov)
2. Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, Animal Health and Welfare, International Trade.  
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3. Foreign Animal Diseases, 1992. US Animal Health Assn.
4. The Picornaviridae, Chapter in Microbiology and Infectious Diseases in Domestic Animals. Hagan And Bruner. 8th Ed. 1988.