

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE (FMD) Q&A

What is Foot and Mouth Disease?

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) is a viral disease of cloven-hooved (two-toed) animals, including cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, and deer. It causes high morbidity (sickness) rates, and is highly contagious. FMD is a serious disease in livestock, but it does not pose a risk to public health or food safety. **Humans cannot contract Foot and Mouth Disease.**¹

The disease causes fever and the development of vesicles (blisters) in and around the mouth of infected animals, including the tongue, lips, and muzzle. Vesicles can also be observed around the coronary band (top) of the hooves, or between the digits (toes) of the hooves, causing lameness. These vesicles burst open and turn into red lesions or erosions. These erosions cause pain that can lead to signs such as depression, inappetence, excessive salivation, and reluctance to move or stand.²

The virus is highly contagious, and affects most animals that are exposed, but most animals that show signs of the disease do not die. However, the disease leaves animals weak and unable to produce meat and milk as efficiently as they would had they not been exposed, therefore it is a disease of economic concern.

How is FMD spread?

Foot and Mouth Disease is spread via direct contact with infected animals. The disease can also be transmitted to susceptible animals via contaminated barns, vehicles, boots/coveralls, water, or other biologic products (feed, hides, semen, etc.). The virus can also be spread by feeding raw or improperly cooked food waste containing meat from affected animals.³

Does FMD exist in the United States?

Currently, FMD does not exist in the United States. It was eradicated in this country in 1929, and the United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service monitors for FMD worldwide to ensure the disease is not re-introduced to the country.⁴

Why is FMD such a concern to the U.S. livestock industry?

Because the disease is highly contagious and affects multiple species, FMD is concerning to all involved in the livestock industries in the United States. Additionally, FMD is a trade-limiting disease, which means if an outbreak occurs in the United States, exports of red meat products would likely be stopped for an unknown amount of time. Finally, the economic impact of FMD can be devastating, because the disease weakens affected animals and greatly decreases production of meat and milk.⁵

Does FMD pose a risk to humans?

Foot and Mouth Disease is a serious disease in livestock, but it does not pose a risk to public health or food safety. **Humans cannot contract Foot and Mouth Disease.**⁶

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

No. The only significant similarity between FMD and Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease is the name. Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease is a viral disease of humans that causes fever, sore throat, and red spots on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. Humans do not get FMD, and animals do not get Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease.⁷

Helpful Links:

United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service:
<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/fmd>

World Organization for Animal Health (OIE):
http://www.oie.int/index.php?id=169&L=0&htmfile=chapitre_fmd.htm

References:

^{1 2 3 4 5 6} United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Factsheet on Foot and Mouth Disease. https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_health/2013/fs_fmd_general.pdf. Accessed June 18, 2019.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease website. <https://www.cdc.gov/features/handfootmouthdisease/index.html>. Accessed June 18, 2019.