

# FACTSHEET

## *Veterinary Services*

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Animal and  
Plant Health  
Inspection  
Service

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## Protecting America From Foot-and-Mouth Disease and Other Highly Contagious Livestock Diseases

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is responsible for protecting U.S. livestock resources from the introduction of harmful, foreign pests and diseases. APHIS works to keep livestock healthy by conducting pest and disease exclusion, detection, eradication, and education activities. The recent foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) outbreaks in Europe, South America, and other areas of the world have underscored the importance of APHIS' animal health safeguarding activities. These activities are critical to keeping FMD and other highly contagious livestock diseases out of the United States.

### What is FMD?

FMD is a severe, highly communicable viral disease of cattle, swine, and other cloven-hooved animals. It is characterized by fever and blister-like lesions and erosions on the tongue and lips, in the mouth, on the teats, and between the hooves of affected animals. Many animals recover from FMD infection, but the disease leaves them debilitated. It also causes severe losses in the production of meat and milk. FMD does not affect humans.

Due to its ability to spread rapidly, and because it has grave economic as well as clinical consequences, FMD is one of the animal diseases that livestock owners dread most. The FMD virus can persist in contaminated fodder and the environment for up to 1 month, depending on the temperature and other conditions. There are seven separate types of the FMD virus, in addition to many subtypes of the virus. Immunity to one type does not protect an animal against other types.

FMD can be spread by animals, people, or materials that bring the virus into physical contact with susceptible animals. There has not been an FMD outbreak in the United States since 1929. However, the disease is considered widespread in parts of Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America.

### What APHIS is Doing to Keep FMD Out of the United States?

APHIS vigilantly and continuously monitors for FMD worldwide. Whenever FMD outbreaks occur, APHIS initiates regulatory action to prohibit the importation of live ruminants and swine and many animal products from FMD-affected countries. In response to the FMD outbreak among some European Union member countries, APHIS has taken the extra precautionary step of temporarily restricting the importation of live ruminants and swine and their products from all European Union member states.

Due to the recent increase in FMD-affected areas around the world, APHIS officials are on heightened alert at U.S. land and maritime ports-of-entry to ensure that passengers, luggage, cargo, and mail are checked for prohibited agricultural products or other items that could carry FMD. Among other measures, additional inspectors and dog teams have been placed at airports to check incoming flights and passengers.

APHIS prohibits travelers from carrying into the United States any agricultural products that could spread FMD and other harmful agricultural pests and diseases. Accordingly, passengers must declare all food items and other material of plant or animal origin in their possession. They must also report visits to farms or other livestock facilities. Failure to declare any items may result in delays and fines of up to \$1,000. Individuals traveling from European Union countries or other countries considered to be FMD-affected must have their shoes disinfected if they have visited farms or other high risk areas.

APHIS also works with the U.S. Armed Forces to ensure the cleaning and disinfection of military vehicles and equipment prior to entry into the United States.

As part of our FMD public education campaign, APHIS is also disseminating information about the disease to USDA partners in industry and in State and local organizations in the United States. We have posted additional advisory signs in airports, broadcasted public service announcements, and established an information hotline and website to inform the public about this important issue and steps they can take to prevent FMD from entering the United States. APHIS is also working closely with the air transportation and travel industries to raise awareness among travelers and airline passengers and crew about the risk of inadvertently spreading FMD.

In addition, Federal and State animal health officials have alerted private veterinarians to ensure heightened monitoring of domestic livestock for FMD. APHIS has an FMD response plan in the event the disease is detected in the United States (please refer to the APHIS Factsheet on the FMD response).

### **What Does APHIS Do to Prevent the Introduction of Other Highly Contagious Livestock Diseases?**

All of the activities APHIS is currently conducting to keep FMD out of the United States are the same ones the Agency uses to prevent the introduction of other harmful and highly contagious livestock diseases. While we have enhanced some of these activities as a direct result of the FMD crisis in parts of Europe, these same activities are routinely practiced by APHIS to protect U.S. livestock resources from a number of foreign animal diseases.

Other foreign animal diseases of concern include: African swine fever, African horse sickness, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, classical swine fever, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, exotic Newcastle disease, Rift Valley fever, rinderpest, and swine vesicular disease, among others.

### **What Can You Do to Help?**

The success of APHIS' efforts to keep FMD and other harmful livestock diseases out of the United States is dependent upon the support and cooperation of many people, including members of the livestock industry and supporting industries, veterinary practitioners, State and local government officials, Federal officials from other Agencies and Departments, and the general public.

APHIS encourages **livestock owners, livestock transport and slaughter personnel, and private veterinary practitioners** to report any unusual animal health symptoms to State or local veterinary officials. This is especially important if symptoms are observed in animals that have had contact with other animals at market, in feedlots, or at fairgrounds.

**Travelers** can make sure they do not bring in prohibited food items and other products, such as soiled footwear and soiled clothing items, that could present a risk of transmitting FMD and other diseases. Travelers should ensure that luggage, packages, and mail are free of any prohibited meats, dairy products, and other at-risk materials before they are shipped to the United States.

In addition, travelers in foreign countries should make note of visits to farms, ranches, or other areas where livestock are raised or kept. Visits to zoos, circuses, fairs, and other facilities and events where livestock and animals are exhibited should also be noted. All such visits should be reported upon return to the United States by answering "yes" to question number 11 on the U.S. Customs Declaration Form ("Have you been on a farm?"). Remember, if in doubt, check "yes"!

Travelers should also shower and shampoo prior to and again after returning to the United States from an FMD-affected country. Launder and/or dry clean clothes before your return to the United States if possible. If you visited a farm or had any contact with livestock on your trip, you should avoid all contact with livestock, zoo animals, or wildlife for 5 days after your return to the United States.

**Dogs and cats** cannot become infected with FMD. Nevertheless, travelers returning to the United States with pet dogs or cats that had contact with livestock or areas frequented by livestock must make sure the pet's feet, fur, and bedding is free of any excessive dirt or mud. Pet bedding should not contain straw, hay, or other natural bedding. The pet should be bathed as soon as it reaches its final destination and kept separate and apart from all livestock for at least 5 days after entry into the United States.

**Horses** can be imported from FMD-affected countries as long as the exporting country complies with the FMD-preventive procedures required by APHIS. Upon entry into the United States, additional precautions must be taken. For instance, horses from affected countries must be wiped down with a disinfectant solution. Footwear of personnel accompanying horses, as well as tack and other equipment, must be disinfected. Crates and transportation vehicles for horses must be cleaned and disinfected. Excess feed, hay, straw, and manure aboard the aircraft must be placed in bags for incineration.

## **For Further Information**

For additional information on USDA's actions to protect U.S. agriculture from FMD, access the USDA website at [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov). Information is given on the types of products prohibited entry into the United States and USDA's other FMD safeguarding efforts. APHIS has also established a toll free telephone number that concerned citizens and cooperators can call to obtain additional information on FMD and APHIS response efforts. The telephone number is 1-800-601-9327.

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