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NF01-454



Information About Foot and Mouth Disease for Nebraska Residents

by David R. Smith, Extension Dairy/Beef Veterinarian

What Is Foot and Mouth Disease?

Foot and mouth disease (FMD) is an extremely contagious viral disease of cloven-hooved animals such as cattle, pigs, sheep, and deer. The disease is not commonly fatal, but causes extreme production losses in affected herds. Clinical signs of the disease include lameness, excessive salivation, reluctance to eat, abortion and blister-like erosions on the mouth and feet. Affected animals are debilitated and may not recover to their original production levels. The disease has long been recognized as one of the most economically devastating diseases of livestock.

The virus is easily transmitted through direct contact between animals or indirectly through the movement of contaminated vehicles, shoes, clothing, or food. The virus can survive in the environment for up to a month.

Humans do not get the disease and FMD does not affect food safety. The last outbreak of FMD in the United States was in 1929. Since that time FMD has remained a foreign animal disease. The disease occurs regularly in some countries in Africa, the Middle East, and South America.

Why Has Foot and Mouth Been in the News Recently?

Recently Great Britain experienced an outbreak of FMD which has spread to Northern Ireland, France, and the Netherlands. Hundreds of thousands of animals have been destroyed in attempts to control the outbreak. Outbreaks of FMD also have been reported recently in Argentina, Bangladesh, and the Middle East.

What Actions Should Take Place to Protect the U.S. Cattle Herd?

The United States continuously maintains an active program to prevent the introduction of FMD to the U.S. cattle herd. These efforts have been strengthened since the outbreak in Europe.

Travelers returning from countries with FMD present a difficult-to-control risk for introduction of the virus into the U.S. Travelers entering through customs should comply with all requests and recommendations of USDA officials. Do not try to sneak in meat or dairy products. Wash all clothes and wipe luggage and shoes with disinfectant solutions as directed. Travelers or their pets that have been on farms in countries with FMD should not visit U.S. farms or ranches for at least one week.

Veterinarians and cattle producers must remain vigilant for clinical signs consistent with FMD and report any suspicions to USDA veterinarians immediately.

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