



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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State and federal officials continue to hold the line on foot-and-mouth disease

OLYMPIA – Foot-and-mouth disease has not been reported in the United States since 1929 or in Washington since 1914. State and federal officials are working hard to keep it that way. In many ways, it is a “battle of the borders,” said Dr. Robert Mead, state veterinarian. The virus has been detected in 32 countries during the last 18 months, most recently in Great Britain, Ireland, Northern Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Iran and Argentina. Humans are not susceptible to the virus, but they can carry it with them on clothing, shoes, luggage and contaminated agricultural products.

The first and best weapon against foot-and-mouth disease is prevention. State and federal departments of Agriculture are working hard to stop the disease in its tracks and to prevent its re-introduction to America. You can help by obeying federal laws that prohibit you from bringing fruits, vegetables, meats, plants, soil and products made from plant or animal material into this country. If someone mails these products to you, dispose of them properly. Do not let them come into contact with animals. If you or a guest have visited a country in which the disease has been diagnosed, stay away from farms and zoos for five days.

Farmers and livestock owners should call the State Veterinarian's Office at (360) 902-1878 or the U.S. Department of Agriculture at (360) 753-9430 to immediately report any unusual or suspicious signs of disease. Early detection could save thousands of animals and billions of dollars.

Veterinarians at the state Department of Agriculture continue to respond to reports of any unusual or suspicious livestock illnesses. One veterinarian has been dispatched to assist officials fighting the virus in Great Britain. And, whole days are spent answering questions from concerned citizens, reporters and producers.

The state of Washington, like other states, is also fleshing out an emergency plan that would mobilize state resources. If a serious animal illness were to strike here, the state Department of Agriculture would work with state and federal agencies to contain the disease and minimize the impact to the state's livestock and farming community. State response efforts – which would include the departments of Fish and Wildlife, Ecology, Health and the State Patrol – would be coordinated by the state Emergency Management Division.

Editor's Note: Attached is a fact sheet on foot-and-mouth disease and precautions for travelers.

MORE

Foot-and-Mouth Disease FACTS

What is foot-and-mouth disease?

It is a highly contagious viral disease of cattle and swine. All cloven-hoofed animals are susceptible and nearly 100 percent of those exposed become ill. Although the disease is not always deadly, it is painful and debilitating. Young animals may die.

Washington cattle, dairy cows, sheep, pigs, llamas and goats are vulnerable. So are vast herds of elk, deer and mountain goats, and the giraffes, elephants and other cloven-hoofed animals at zoos. If just one case occurred, thousands of animals could be infected because the virus can be carried up to 30 miles by the wind. That's why so many animals are being slaughtered in Europe; a buffer strip is needed to prevent the disease from spreading to healthy animals.

Why is foot-and-mouth disease a threat to the U.S. now?

The risk of the disease entering the U.S. is not new; it has existed in many countries for years. It was just a year ago in April that Washington's state veterinarian issued a news release warning livestock producers to prevent farm or ranch visits by anyone who had been to South Korea or Japan because of an Asian outbreak of foot-and-mouth that was successfully contained. Increased travel and the globalization of food trade bring increased risks for disease and additional responsibilities to be on alert.

What are symptoms of foot-and-mouth disease?

Painful blisters may form in the mouth or on the muzzle, causing slobbering or drooling. Later, the blisters break, forming raw patches or ulcers. Blisters can also develop on a female animal's teats, causing mastitis in dairy cattle. Blisters on the feet cause lameness. Affected animals are reluctant or unable to drink, eat or walk. And they will lose weight quickly.

Why doesn't the U.S. vaccinate animals now?

Although a vaccine exists, there are seven separate types of foot-and-mouth virus. Immunity against one does not protect an animal from other types. A vaccination program would impair the United States' vast animal agricultural industry because animals sold for export must test negative for foot-and-mouth disease. There is no way to distinguish between a positive test from vaccine versus exposure to the disease.

How is foot-and-mouth disease spread?

Animals are infected when they come into contact with animals, humans or materials that have been exposed to the virus. Contaminated feed, feeding utensils, vehicles, clothing or holding facilities may cause illness in susceptible animals.

Once they are infected, animals spread the virus to other animals and the environment when they breathe. Although they do not become ill, persons who have been around infected animals can carry the virus in their nasal passages for up to 24 hours. It is also carried on clothing, shoes, luggage, hair or other items that may be exposed. The virus is also carried in raw meat, animal products or milk from exposed or infected animals.

MORE

That is why it is so important for international travelers to declare **all** fruits, vegetables, meats, plants, soil and products made from plant or animal materials to U.S. Customs officials. One piece of meat or fruit may not seem important, but it is quite likely that a traveler carried the Mediterranean fruit fly to California, for example. The three-year fight to eradicate the pest cost more than \$100 million. And, British officials now believe their foot-and-mouth disease outbreak was caused by infected meat smuggled into England. The meat was served at restaurants and the leftovers were fed as swill to pigs.

What should I do if I receive meat or animals products in the mail?

If you receive meat or animals products from a country in which foot-and-mouth disease has been diagnosed, and your garbage goes to a landfill, put it in the trash. Do not dispose of any meat or other animal products where they could be eaten by animals. A single piece of contaminated sausage could set off a devastating foot-and-mouth epidemic in this country.

What should I do if I have foreign guests, or I have traveled abroad?

If you or your guests are returning from a country in which foot-and-mouth disease has been diagnosed, take a shower, shampoo and change into clean clothing. Wash or dry-clean clothes in your suitcase. Use a disinfectant to remove all dirt or organic material from shoes, luggage and personal items. And, stay away from farms and zoos for five days.

My guest has a dog. Can he expose my pigs?

The virus could be on the dog's fur. Play it safe. Ask your guest to give the dog – or other animals that may have been exposed to the virus – a bath and a good shampoo before it is allowed near livestock.

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Editor's Note: More information about state and federal efforts to protect American agriculture against foot-and-mouth disease is available on the Web site of the U.S. Department of Agriculture at www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/fmd/index.html