Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)

What is FMD and what causes it?

Foot-and-mouth disease is a viral disease of cattle, pigs, and other cloven hooved animals (two toes). FMD causes painful sores and blisters to develop on the feet and teats of animals and in their mouth. It is spread by direct contact with infected animals, through the air, and on contaminated objects.

What animals get FMD?

FMD affects cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, deer, and other cloven-hooved animals. Cattle are the indicator hosts of the disease. They get FMD, become very sick and usually develop the well-known mouth and feet sores. Pigs are amplifiers of the disease, meaning when infected with FMD they make large amounts of the virus that can infect other species. Sheep and goats are considered maintenance hosts. They get sick, but the disease is mild and often goes unnoticed, thereby giving it a chance to spread to other cloven hooved animals.

How can my animal get FMD?

The disease is spread by direct contact such as when a healthy animal touches, rubs, or licks an animal that is sick. It can also be spread when healthy animals eat (oral) from a feed trough where an infected animal has eaten or drooled saliva. The virus can also travel through the air (aerosol) when an animal coughs or sneezes. Finally, people can be an unexpected means of transmission (fomites). FMD can be carried on clothes, shoes, and even the nasal passages of people that have had contact with infected animals.

How does FMD affect my animal?

In general, the most common sign of foot-and-mouth disease is the formation of sores on the tongue, mouth, feet, and teats. Infected cattle are depressed, reluctant to move and not able to eat which can lead to a decrease in milk production. They also drool, and in many cases, make a loud smacking sound. Pigs with the disease often have sore feet but less commonly develop oral lesions. In sheep, the illness is difficult to recognize. They are less likely to develop mouth sores and lameness from this disease.

Can I get FMD?

No. People do not develop significant illness.

Who should I contact, if I suspect FMD?

In Animals – Contact your veterinarian.

How can I protect my animal from FMD?

FMD is considered a foreign animal disease and has not been found in the United States since 1929. The best approach to prevention is surveillance.

Becoming aware of the signs of the disease (sores in the mouth, on the feet, teats) and the conditions resulting in the transmission of the disease (the introduction of infected animals into the herd, or contaminated feed or objects from unknown sources) are the best ways to protect your animals.

In a FMD outbreak, limit all contact with animals and visitors and quarantine all newly introduced animals for a period of time established with your herd veterinarian.

For More Information

CFSPH Technical Fact Sheets. Foot and Mouth Disease at http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/


OIE Disease Cards. Foot and Mouth Disease. http://www.oie.int/eng/maladies/fiches/a_A010.htm