



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE



Q. --What is foot-and-mouth disease?

A.--Foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) is a highly contagious viral disease that does not affect humans but has devastating effects on animals with cloven hooves such as cattle, swine, sheep, goats and deer. The U.S. has not had a case of foot-and-mouth disease since 1929, and that occurrence was contained and eradicated quickly.

There are seven types of the FMD virus, all of which have similar symptoms. Immunity to one type does not protect animals from other types. The average incubation period for FMD is between three and eight days, but it can be up to two weeks in some cases. The disease is rarely fatal, but may kill very young animals. Those that survive are often debilitated and experience severe loss in milk or meat production. FMD does not affect humans, although people can carry the virus on clothing and other surfaces if they come in contact with the virus.

Q. --What are the symptoms of foot-and-mouth disease?

A.--The most obvious signs of the disease in animals are excessive slobbering, going off feed and lameness. Affected animals may have a sudden rise in temperature, followed by blisters in the mouth or other areas of tender skin such as udders in females, nostrils and on the feet - particularly near the hooves. Soft tissues under the hoof are often inflamed, and the animal can become lame and may even shed its hooves. Eating becomes painful, and many animals often go off feed, which results in weight loss, declined milk production for dairy cattle and goats, and declined meat production. In some cases, affected animals can suffer from sterility, chronic lameness, aborted pregnancies and chronic mastitis.

Q. --How is it spread?

A.--Foot-and-mouth disease is a highly contagious virus and can be spread by movement of infected animals, movement of contaminated vehicles, and by contaminated facilities used to hold animals. It also can infect animals through contaminated hay or feedstuffs and if susceptible animals drink from a common water source. While FMD is not considered a threat to human health, people who come in contact with the virus can spread it to animals through clothing, footwear or other equipment/materials. The virus can harbor in the human nasal passages for as long as 28 hours. Wind also can spread the virus through the air.

Q.--Can people contract foot-and-mouth disease?

A.--Foot-and-mouth disease typically does not affect humans. There is only one recorded case from Britain in 1966, and that person experienced symptoms similar to the flu with some blisters. People can, however, spread the virus to animals because it can persist on contaminated clothing, footwear, and other materials for several weeks, and can harbor in human nasal passages for as long as 28 hours.

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Q. --If foot-and-mouth disease rarely kills animals, and if people can't contract the virus, why is there so much concern about it?

A.--Foot-and-mouth disease is a very contagious virus, with nearly 100 percent of exposed animals ultimately becoming infected. If the disease grew to be widespread in any country, the economic impact could be severe. The most serious effects would include severe decline in milk from dairy cattle and goats, decline in meat production, possible sterility of animals, chronic lameness and chronic mastitis among affected.

Q.--What would be the economic impact if foot-and-mouth disease did occur in the U.S.?

A.--If FMD were to occur in the U.S., the degree of economic impact would depend on how quickly the disease was identified and effective control measures put in place. If it was controlled quickly and eradicated, as was the case with the last occurrence of FMD in the U.S. back in 1929, the damage might be small. However, if the disease became widespread, the economic loss could easily be many billions of dollars.

Q. --Is there a treatment or cure?

A.--The virus can be killed by heat, low humidity and some disinfectants. It is rarely fatal to animals but may kill very young animals. There is no cure, and the virus usually runs its course in two to three weeks with most animals recovering. However, affected animals can become debilitated and suffer loss of milk or meat production.

Q. --Is foot-and mouth disease present in U.S. cattle herds?

A.--No. The U.S. has not had a case of foot-and-mouth disease since 1929, which was contained and eradicated quickly. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regularly monitors for any disease among U.S. cattle herds and takes aggressive steps to prevent FMD from spreading to the U.S. whenever there is an outbreak in other countries:

- As part of its ongoing surveillance program, the USDA conducts hundreds of field inquiries each year in an effort to detect animal diseases that might affect livestock.
- When there is an outbreak of FMD in another country, the U.S. temporarily prohibits the importation of animals and animal products from the European Union into the United States. These restrictions augment those already in place on ruminants and ruminant products to prevent the introduction of BSE into the U.S.
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- The government also prohibits travelers from carrying into the United States any agricultural products, particularly animal products that could spread FMD. Passengers are required to identify any farm contact to Customs and USDA officials. All baggage is subject to inspection. Violations could result in penalties of up to \$1,000.
- A team of experts (40 federal, state and University officials) is sent to the European Union - or other country with an outbreak - to monitor, evaluate and assist in containment efforts.
- There is heightened alert at ports of entry and airports to ensure passengers, luggage and cargo are checked as appropriate. This includes placing additional inspectors and dog teams at airports to check incoming flights and passengers.
- USDA officials also are stationed around the globe to monitor and coordinate with the state agriculture officials.

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- USDA recently initiated an aggressive public education campaign that includes additional signage in airports, public service announcements, website, and other tools to inform the public about this important issue and steps they can take to prevent it from entering the United States. The USDA also recently established an 800 number to respond to questions from the public, industry and media about the foot-and-mouth outbreak in Europe.

Q. --What can beef producers in the U.S. do to help prevent foot-and-mouth disease?

A.--While there are currently no cases of foot-and-mouth disease in the U.S., there are several steps producers can take to help prevent the virus from spreading if it ever did show up here:

- Know who is on your farms/ranches/property at all times. If people from other countries where confirmed cases of FMD have been found are scheduled to visit your property, make sure they wear freshly cleaned clothing and footwear.
- Make sure people wash their clothes, footwear before traveling to another farm/ranch/property.
- Immediately contact your state veterinarian, State or Federal animal disease control centers or your country agricultural agent if you suspect symptoms of FMD.

Q. --What can consumers do to help prevent foot-and-mouth disease from occurring in the U.S.?

A.--All international travelers coming into the U.S. must state on their Customs declaration form whether or not they have been on a farm or have been in contact with livestock. If they have, then:

- Any soiled footwear must be disinfected with detergent and bleach.
- Dirty clothing must be washed and disinfected prior to returning to the U.S.
- All international travelers also must declare if they are bringing any meat or dairy products into the U.S. USDA officials will then inspect baggage of those travelers and confiscate products from swine and ruminants (cattle, sheep, goats, deer and other cloven-hoofed animals), with the exception of hard cheeses and canned products with a shelf life.
- If travelers are around livestock in the UK and other affected countries they should avoid contact with susceptible animals for at least 5 days after returning to the U.S.

Q. --Is the meat or milk from affected animals also contaminated?

A.--Uncooked meat and some types of milk products from contaminated animals can carry the virus. However, since the virus does not affect humans and would be destroyed when products are cooked, the primary risk of raw products is transmission of the virus to susceptible animals.

Q. --With so much attention to diseases like foot-and mouth disease and BSE, should consumers stop eating beef for a while?

A.--The U.S. remains free of BSE and FMD, so U.S. consumers can continue to enjoy their favorite beef dishes. Neither disease has been detected here in the U.S., and it's not for a lack of looking.

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Beginning in 1989, the U.S. enacted a series of import bans to keep BSE from ever entering or occurring in this country. An FDA regulation prohibiting certain materials from cattle feed ensures that BSE could not spread if it ever did get into this country. The U.S. was the first country to enact stringent prevention measures without having BSE within its borders.

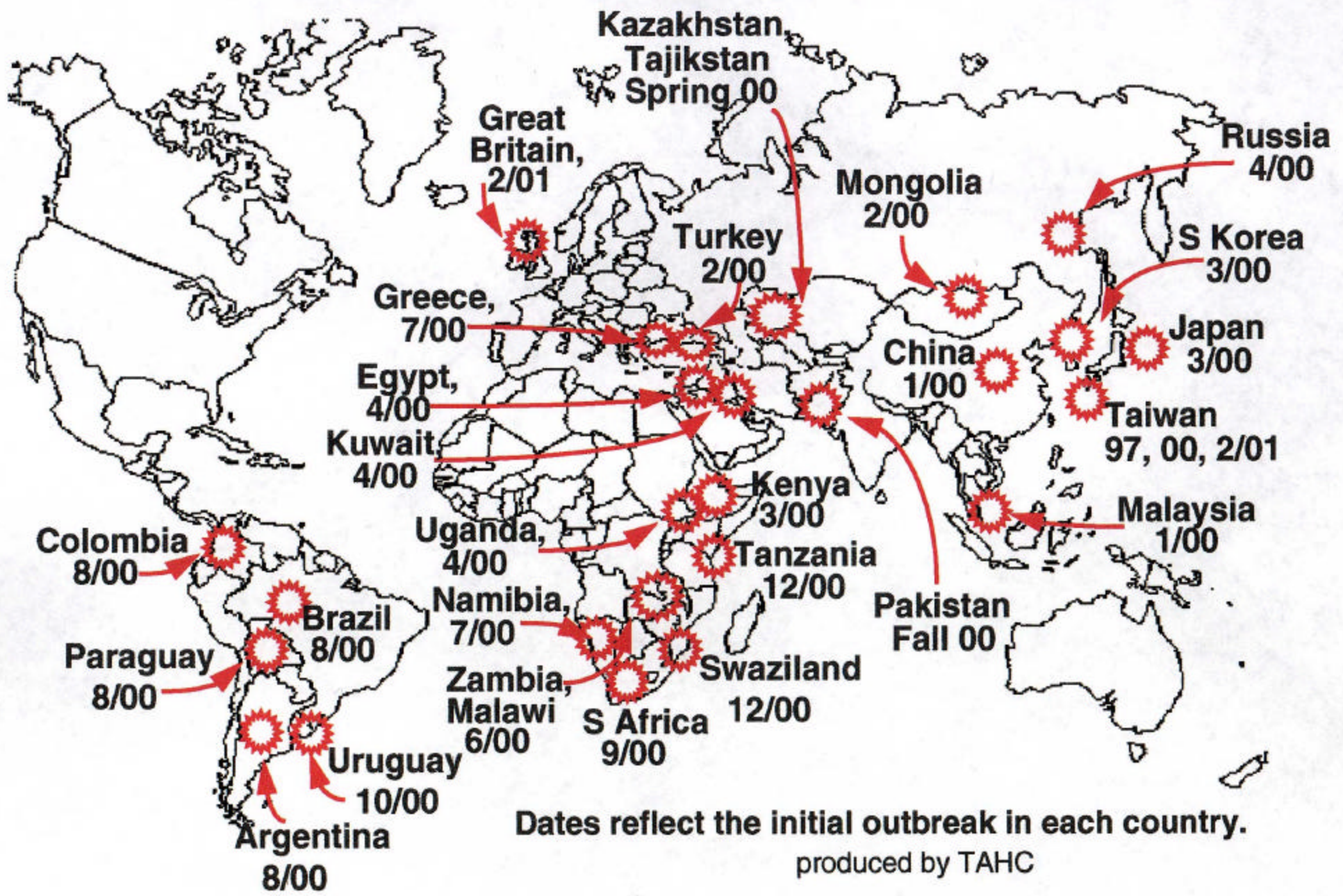
As for FMD, the U.S. has not had a case since 1929, and even then the case was detected quickly and eradicated. The USDA takes many steps to prevent foot-and-mouth disease from spreading to the U.S. whenever there is an outbreak in other countries. And, individual farmers and ranchers are strongly encouraged to survey their herds for signs of any disease as part of ongoing beef quality assurance efforts.

Raising healthy cattle is key to the livelihood of Americas one million beef producers. And, market research tells us the confidence of U.S. consumers in the safety of U.S. beef products remains very strong.

Q—Where can I find more information?

A—The Texas Animal Health Commission is the lead agency in Texas. They can be reached on the Internet at www.tahc.state.tx.us or at (512) 719-0700. The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service web site is www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/fmd/index.html. USDA has a foot-and-mouth disease hotline at (800) 601-9327, option No. 2.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) Outbreaks 1/00-2/01



Dates reflect the initial outbreak in each country.
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