Danger: watch out for foot-and-mouth disease

Department of Agriculture, Western Australia
DANGER

WATCH OUT FOR FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE

This article was prepared by officers of the Department of Agriculture’s Animal Division, with the approval of the Chief Quarantine Officer (Animals) for Western Australia.

THE introduction of foot-and-mouth disease into Australia would be an event of national importance. Its economic consequences could be far-reaching and grave.

This is one of the most rapidly-spreading of all animal diseases and if uncontrolled could infect most, if not all cattle, sheep and pig populations in Australia.

Foot-and-mouth disease is caused by a very resistant virus. In addition to the domestic species mentioned above, other cloven hoofed animals such as buffalo and goats are susceptible and play a part in the transmission of the disease. There are seven different types of the virus and many variations within types. Animals that recover from an outbreak caused by one type are still fully susceptible to an attack by any of the other types.

Foot-and-mouth disease is present in many countries. North America, Australia and New Zealand and a few other places are free from the infection and tremendous efforts are made to keep them so.

Under certain conditions the virus is able to survive for long periods. Infection may be spread not only by infected live animals, but also by materials contaminated by their discharges. The virus is able to survive in uncooked meat products and hides.

The introduction of ruminants and pigs into Australia is prohibited, at the present time, from all countries. Animal products capable of carrying the virus are also prohibited imports except under very special conditions ensuring the freedom of the product from virus.

Even though quarantine authorities are constantly vigilant in these matters, other precautions must be carried out. Foremost among these are:

- The establishment of machinery for the detection of foot-and-mouth disease at the earliest possible moment.
- The organisation of the entire community under the control of the Government Veterinary Services for the control and eradication of the disease.

Foot-and-mouth disease could conceivably enter a country by way of animal products brought in illegally, by individuals recently contacting affected livestock and by ship's garbage improperly disposed of in ports. It is therefore essential that everyone concerned with livestock, particularly those having advisory duties (veterinarians, agricultural advisers, etc.), should become familiar with the clinical signs and bodily changes that may suggest foot-and-mouth disease.

It is vital to call in a veterinary surgeon at the earliest possible moment to bring the detection machinery into action.

Only a qualified veterinarian is capable of making the decision that a sick animal may be affected with foot-and-mouth disease.
Study these photographs . . . read the article with care. They may help you to recognise the first symptoms of foot-and-mouth disease—a disease considered such a threat to Australia's livestock that under a co-ordinated plan now prepared throughout the Commonwealth any outbreak would be treated as a national emergency.

The disease

Whitish blisters, or vesicles, in the mouth or on the feet and the associated slobbering or lameness are the best recognised signs of foot-and-mouth disease.

In the mouth the blisters may be anywhere on the tongue or the gums or inside the lips. In pigs there may be blisters on the snout. On the feet, the blisters form in the space between the claws, around
the top of the hoof or on the bulb of the heel. Occasionally, blisters appear on other sites such as the udder or teats.

These blisters quickly enlarge, then rupture, leaving a white membrane. When this membrane is removed, a raw red bleeding surface remains, with ragged edges. The affected parts are extremely painful. If they are in the mouth, the animal goes off its feed and salivates profusely, the saliva hanging from the mouth in ropey strands; if the blisters are on the feet, intense lameness results.

The clinical signs in sheep, although similar to those in cattle, are usually milder and may not be noticed. The foot-and-mouth lesions may superficially resemble those of foot-rot or “scabby-mouth.” Therefore the detection of the disease may be much more difficult in an animal population dominated by sheep.

Because this disease is so contagious, an outbreak would be likely to involve many animals of all age groups becoming sick at the same time. Thus, the simultaneous appearance of any lame and/or salivating animals should arouse suspicion of foot-and-mouth disease. Deaths from the disease are variable and depend on the virulence of the virus strain. There is, however, a rapid loss of condition in affected animals, causing a reduced meat and milk production.

**Control and eradication**

The Western Australian Department of Agriculture has, in common with the other State Departments of Agriculture prepared a detailed plan to be carried out in the event of an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.

Each State plan is under the direction of the Chief Veterinary Officer of that State.

Teams of veterinary officers for the diagnosis of the disease, and for inspection, quarantine and eradication procedures on infected and suspect farms and districts have been formed. An outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease will be regarded as a national emergency and the machinery being organised to deal surely and quickly with it will involve every aspect of the agricultural life of the community. Movement of livestock, animal transport and of people within quarantine and control zones will be curtailed. The meat and milk industries will be rigidly controlled.

In fact, all available resources of the Australian community needed to control and eradicate the disease will be mobilised.

The most important thing for the farmer or stockman to remember is that early diagnosis is vital for a rapid isolation and eradication of foot-and-mouth disease.

On the first suspicion of any sign of foot-and-mouth disease, the person making the observation is required to telephone the nearest Government veterinary officer or stock inspector. He must then disinfect himself as well as he can and remain on the suspect premises until the Government officer arrives.

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**DISEASE RIFE IN U.K. HERDS**

LONDON, Sunday.—More than 17,000 British farm animals have been slaughtered so far in a bid by the government to stop the spread of foot-and-mouth disease.

The number of confirmed outbreaks of the disease increased by 14 yesterday to a total of 75.

British law makes it compulsory to slaughter all animals in contact with the disease.

By last night 17,606 animals had been slaughtered, including 6,435 cattle, 5,192 sheep and 5,959 pigs.

The Dutch government yesterday announced a ban on all imports of live animals and carcass meat from Britain because of the epidemic.

In the past few days Britain has slaughtered 4,909 cattle.
No doubt about it, Harry really loves kids. Loves to have them about when he’s working. Even takes them for trips on the tractor. Great fun!

And another thing about Harry, he’s lucky. Not one of the youngsters ever got caught in his moving machinery, or fell off or got run over or was ever hurt in any way. Touch Harry for luck!

Any one of his trips could have been a one-way excursion for some trusting, laughing child. No use telling Harry to quit. He loves kids too much. Or does he?
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