Bundesministerium
für Ernährung
und Landwirtschaft

General FAQs on foot-and-mouth disease

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What has happened?

On 10 January 2025, foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) was detected in a water buffalo in the district of Märkisch Oderland (federal state of Brandenburg). This is the first case of FMD in Germany since 1988. The serotype of the virus causing the disease has been identified, however, the route of infection still remains unknown. Further cases have not been detected despite extensive sampling and examinations. The main priority is and has been to prevent the spread of the virus, i.e. to protect other animals and in this way to minimise the damage to the domestic food and agricultural sector.

What is foot-and-mouth disease (FMD)?

FMD is caused by a virus. Infected animals develop vesicles (blisters) on the inner lips, gumline, hooves and teats. Symptoms also include high fever, severe pain, lameness and, in the case of lactating animals, severe losses in milk production. For most animals, FMD is not fatal. There is no treatment option for infected animals.

FMD is a highly contagious disease with a short incubation period, as a result of which it spreads very rapidly. It is particularly infectious and virulent in cloven-hoofed animals such as cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and certain wild animals. Other animal species and humans either do not contract the disease or show only mild

symptoms (vesicles on mucous membranes). Animals that have recovered from the disease can remain carriers of the infectious FMD virus over a long period of time and infect other animals.

The FMD virus is very persistent in the environment. It can remain infectious for months or years in the soil, in sewage or slurry, and also in frozen or dried form (in hair, on clothing or shoes, in hay etc.). The virus is either transmitted directly from animal to animal (via secretions or excrement) or indirectly on vehicles, equipment, shoes and clothing. Airborne transmission is also possible.

Is foot-and-mouth disease contagious or dangerous for humans?

FMD is not dangerous for humans. Infection through the consumption of food or by human-to-human transmission is unknown. Individual infections in humans who had direct and intensive contact with infected cloven-hoofed animals or with the FMD virus itself are described in technical literature. These cases resulted in mild illness that cleared up spontaneously. As far as foods are concerned, pasteurised milk and dairy products, for example, are not assumed to present any danger under usual modern-day hygiene conditions. Milk and meat can therefore be consumed without concern.

Does foot-and-mouth disease have anything to do with hand, foot and mouth disease in humans?

No. Due to similarities in the symptoms, FMD is sometimes confused with hand, foot and mouth disease, which mainly affects young children. There is no connection between the two diseases, however.

Can pets contract FMD?

Dogs, cats and other domestic animals (such as horses) cannot usually contract the disease. They can become contaminated with the virus, however, and thus spread it indirectly.

What has happened to the affected herd?

The competent authority in Brandenburg closed the affected farm with immediate effect and killed and safely destroyed the animals susceptible to FMD.

What was done to contain FMD in Germany?

The competent authority in Brandenburg established restricted zones from which it is *inter alia* generally prohibited to transport animals and animal products. Livestock farms inside the restricted zones and identified contact farms have been or are being investigated to determine the cause and extent of the infection and – in the event that other infected farms are identified – for the necessary action to be taken as swiftly as possible. Further cases have not been detected despite extensive sampling and examinations.

The states of Brandenburg and Berlin initially imposed a standstill for cloven-hoofed animals – that is, a blanket ban on moving animals susceptible to FMD. This standstill lasted until 17 January 2025 in Brandenburg and 27 January 2025 in Berlin. The immediate standstill was a vital measure, initially for gaining relevant knowledge about the outbreak and thus for preventing any possible further spread of this highly contagious animal disease. In addition, Berlin's Zoo and Tierpark were temporarily closed, and no cloven-hoofed animals were being exhibited at the Berlin Grüne Woche trade fair (17-26 January 2025).

Alongside these measures, the national task force on animal disease control has been meeting since the day the outbreak was identified. The Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) has also convened the central animal disease crisis team and is consulting with the German federal states (*Länder*) and the EU on the further course of action. The relevant committee of the German Bundestag met on Wednesday, 15 January 2025, for a special session. Moreover, consultations with agricultural and food industry associations are held.

The EU Commission passed an Implementing Decision on 11 February 2025, laying down the further steps regarding the animal health restricted zones. The Decision was possible because the animal disease control measures were implemented speedily and there was no further spread of the disease. First, the 3-km restricted zone was lifted with immediate effect and integrated into the surveillance zone. As a second step, the surveillance measures have remained in force in a smaller zone from 24 February 2025 until 11 April 2025.

Is it possible to vaccinate against FMD?

To stop FMD from spreading, priority is given to containing the virus with immediately effective measures, such as movement restrictions, by establishing restricted zones and imposing standstills as described above. This is an expedient step from an epidemiological perspective and helps to limit economic damage.

Now that the Friedrich Loeffler Institute has identified the virus serotype, the suitable vaccine will quickly be able to be produced in a sufficient quantity thanks to the existing FMD vaccine bank (activation of the vaccine reserve). Brandenburg has now requested the activation of this vaccine reserve in order to be equipped for all conceivable scenarios and to be able to respond quickly should vaccinations become necessary.

The activation of the vaccine reserve at this point in time is intended to strengthen the capacity to respond in the control of the disease, since at least six days are needed from activation to the possible provision of the vaccine. The activation of the vaccine reserve is not tantamount to a decision on whether the vaccine will actually be deployed. Its use will only be considered if the outbreak continues to spread.

EU law only permits emergency vaccinations in exceptional circumstances, as the European Union has been free from FMD for many years and vaccination is consequently not the containment option of first choice. Emergency vaccination would thus only be considered if the infection spreads widely and rapidly. An emergency vaccination in the form of a ring vaccination would make it possible, for instance, to create a barrier of immunity around the outbreak site and consequently to prevent the disease from spreading further.

FLI FAQs: https://www.openagrar.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/openagrar_derivate_00063922/FLI-FAQ_MKS_2025-01-17_en_bf.pdf

What does this mean for exports to other EU member states or third countries?

In the EU internal market, meat and dairy products produced outside the restricted zone can continue to be traded via the regionalisation system. On 15 January 2025, the European Commission confirmed the restricted zones set up by Brandenburg and consequently created the foundation for the regionalisation.

However, the suspension of FMD-free status means that, under the requirements of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), veterinary certificates can no longer be issued in many cases for exports to third countries – particularly for products from ruminants and pigs. This means that it is currently practically impossible to export, for example, milk and dairy products, meat and meat products, and also hides and skins, salted natural casings, semen and blood products.

Several third countries have also already sealed their markets for animals and animal products from Germany due to the FMD outbreak. The BMEL is in close exchange with a large number of third countries. It is relying on transparent information and attempting, using the example of the EU regionalisation principle, to keep markets open as far as is possible.

The World Organisation for Animal Health stipulates what needs to be done to regain “FMD-free” status (https://www.woah.org/en/home/). The point at which the freedom from FMD can be regained without vaccination depends inter alia on WOAH approving the data on FMD surveillance throughout Germany, and on the transmission of further specific information to WOAH.

What assistance is given to agricultural holdings?

The current situation is a huge burden for animal farmers. The most important thing at present is to explain the outbreak and prevent the spread of FMD. The holdings whose animals have to be culled are compensated directly for the culling and transport by the Animal Disease Fund of the Land of Brandenburg, assuming they meet the conditions (e.g. the animal farmer has paid his contribution to the fund). The Rentenbank also initiates its liquidity assurance programme and consequently supports all agricultural holdings that have been affected by the impact of FMD. Together with the EU Commission, the BMEL is moreover examining an extraordinary support measure pursuant to Article 220 of the Common Market Organisation. In addition to this, the BMEL is also in contact with the lead Federal Ministry of Finance on possible tax relief measures such as deferment and enforcement measures and the adjustment of advance payments.

The BMEL also seeks to persuade trading partners to keep their markets open for animals and products from Germany in order to also minimise the economic damage for holdings not directly affected by FMD.

What information is available on the FMD outbreak in Hungary?

To foot-and-mouth disease was detected on a cattle farm in northwest Hungary in early March. This is the first outbreak in Hungary since 1973. Based on the present information, there is no evidence whatsoever suggesting that the FMD outbreak in Brandenburg in early January 2025 and the FMD outbreak in Hungary in early March 2025 are connected.

For further information please go to: https://www.bmel.de/fmd