

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

What is Foot and Mouth Disease?

Foot and Mouth disease is a highly infectious viral disease in which fever is followed by the development of vesicles or blisters – more often in the mouth or on the feet. There are seven main types of virus which produce similar symptoms and which can only be differentiated in the laboratory. Foot and Mouth disease affects cloven-hoofed animals – namely cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and deer. It does not affect cats, dogs or horses.

The symptoms of the disease are vesicular eruptions (blisters) which appear mainly in the area of the feet and mouth but can also appear in other areas, e.g. mammary glands. It is extremely contagious and has an incubation period of 3-8 days (this period can be shorter or may extend to 14 days or longer). The disease can be destroyed by high heat, low humidity, or any disinfectant which indicates on the container label that it is approved for use against foot-and-mouth disease. However, the disease may remain active for a varying time in a suitable medium such as the frozen or chilled carcass of an infected animal and on contaminated objects.

Foot and Mouth Disease and Humans

There has only been one recorded case of Foot and Mouth disease in a human being in Great Britain in 1966. All suspected cases, which arose during the crisis in 2001, proved to be false alarms. The general effects of the disease in the human case were similar to influenza with some blisters. It is a mild short-lived, self-limiting disease. The Food Standards Agency has advised that the disease has no implications for the human food chain. There is, however, a human condition called Hand, Foot and Mouth disease, which is unrelated and does not affect animals.

The virus that causes the disease is easily transported via routes such as clothing, vehicles, shoes, hair, feet and fur. The disease may also be airborne. Bearing these facts in mind, during an outbreak, the Pet Health Council recommends:

- People should not walk on or even near any farmland until the outbreak is contained and that they minimize contact with wild animals
- Under no circumstances enter a farm without the farmer's express permission
- Dogs should be kept under strict control at all times when out for a walk. At all other times, dogs must be in an enclosure or kennel from which it cannot escape, or tethered securely by a collar and chain
- Cats are not affected, but the Pet Health Council recommends that where possible and particularly in infected areas, cats should be restricted from "free-roaming".

While the disease is not a threat to pet owners and their pets, everyone should avoid infected areas to avoid transmitting the disease.

Pets are Good for People

Pets provide us with loyalty, companionship, love and affection, as well as the many physical and psychological benefits. The least we can do to repay this is to ensure that we keep them in the best of health. A healthy pet is a happy pet and a happy pet can help us enjoy a much fuller and more rewarding life.

- ends -

For further information, please contact the Pet Health Council on:

Telephone: 020 7379 6545

Email: enquiries@pethealthcouncil.co.uk

Website: www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk