

# foot and mouth facts

## For 4-H'ers and county fair participants

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### **My child has a 4-H livestock project. I hear all this talk about foot and mouth disease. Do I need to be concerned?**

There's no need for panic, but do stay informed. As you probably know, foot and mouth disease is a highly contagious viral disease that has recently affected livestock in other countries. The virus can travel on the wind and can persist on clothing or shoes for several weeks.

Prevention of infection is the current game plan. For your part, you might want to avoid international travel. And be cautious regarding visits from friends who have traveled overseas recently. Ask them to not wear shoes or clothing they wore during their travels, and possibly avoid visits altogether for the first few weeks after they return.

While the disease has yet to make its way to the United States, experts believe an appearance is likely. The risk of disease is greatest in cool, moist climates. As summer approaches, Colorado weather is increasingly warm and dry. This puts us at less risk than many other regions. We are not immune, however.

Early symptoms of foot and mouth disease include fever and blister-like lesions followed by erosions on the tongue and lips, in the mouth, on the teats, and between the hooves. These erosions lead to excessive salivation or lameness. If you observe these symptoms in your animals, have them checked by a veterinarian.

If an infected animal is identified, attempts will be made to isolate the outbreak. A quarantine area of several miles will be established. Animals within this area may be vaccinated or destroyed, depending on the risk of spreading infection as determined by veterinarians and animal health officials.

Restrictions may be imposed on the movement of animals outside the quarantine area. Animal events at county fairs could be affected; your local 4-H agent will alert 4-H members if a county fair is affected. These restrictions will be aimed at isolating and controlling outbreaks to prevent a nationwide epidemic.

If the disease makes its way to Colorado, there will be plenty of information available. Stay informed and follow all recommendations you receive from United States Department of Agriculture, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, or your veterinarian. Information also is available at the Colorado State Cooperative Extension Web site on foot and mouth disease at [www.footandmouth.colostate.edu](http://www.footandmouth.colostate.edu).

Additional information is available at the USDA-APHIS Web site, [www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/fmd/index.html](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/fmd/index.html) and the Colorado Department of Agriculture Web site [www.ag.state.co.us/](http://www.ag.state.co.us/).

As a parent of a 4-H'er, use this opportunity to educate your children about animal health management. Let them know they are responsible for protecting their animals. Point out that livestock owners throughout the country need to work together to protect each other.

Your concern is warranted, but again, there is no need to panic. Take proper precautions and stay informed.

by Ernest Marx, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, Larimer County agriculture agent