

foot and mouth facts

Is foot and mouth disease a risk to my health?

Although foot and mouth disease can make some animal species ill, it is not a health risk to humans. It only affects certain species of animals, and is extremely rare in people. At this point, the food supply in the United States has not been exposed to foot and mouth disease and is not carrying the virus that causes the disease. People eating the American food supply are not exposed to the virus through food or any other means unless the virus reaches the United States and causes an outbreak. At that point, the United States Department of Agriculture will regulate the outbreak and the food and food products connected to that outbreak to ensure that the food supply is not carrying the virus.

However, people pose a large risk to spreading the disease to other animals because the virus that causes the disease can travel on clothing, vehicles, hair, etc. Although people are correct in thinking that foot and mouth disease is not a threat to their health, a large, global or U.S. outbreak of foot and mouth disease might impact the availability of meat and dairy products. That's why government regulations are in place to keep foot and mouth disease out of America.

The virus that causes foot and mouth disease can travel on and in many objects, including food and food containers. That is the reason that the USDA regulates food and food products that are brought into the United States, even if they are just items tucked into a suitcase. Because of the risk of foot and mouth disease, officials are on high alert at airports and other ports of entry to ensure that passengers, luggage, cargo and mail are checked for prohibited products that could carry foot and mouth disease. The virus that causes foot and mouth disease can live in some products, such as dairy food, for months. It can be spread through undercooked and raw contaminated food in the garbage, or containers that have held contaminated food.

Thoroughly cooked food that is derived from an animal infected with foot and mouth disease is not a human risk when eaten. However, meat and milk products can carry the virus to other animals including rats, wildlife and domestic farm animals. For example, rats can contract the disease through food scraps or food containers in the trash that have been exposed to the virus. Government regulations are in place to ensure that no contaminated meat or milk gets out of a quarantined area.

If an outbreak of foot and mouth disease hit the United States, the USDA would regulate the distribution and destruction of meat and dairy products as necessary to control the disease. For example, milk from animals on a farm infected with the disease would be destroyed on the farm to prevent other animals from being exposed to the virus via human movement of dairy products.

Travelers coming into the United States from another country should report any visits to farms, ranchers, zoos, circuses, fairs and other events or areas where livestock and animals are exhibited or held. If travelers were around animals, they should avoid contact with livestock, zoo animals and wildlife for 5 days after returning to the United States.