



Frequently Asked Questions about the foot-and-mouth disease

April 2025

Is Estonia ready for the foot-and-mouth disease and what precautions have been taken?

The authority organising preventive and control measures of infectious animal diseases in Estonia is the Agriculture and Food Board (AFB).

The implementing act of the reaction principles provided for in the animal health regulations of the EU and its delegated regulations is the Veterinary Act, and upon suspected and actual disease outbreak the situation plan, foot-and-mouth disease action plan, staff work rules and reaction plan of the AFB are relied upon.

The Board is consistently assessing the infectious animal disease outbreak risk and amends the level of readiness accordingly.

To ensure better preparation, the AFB organises annual relevant trainings in various formats (workshops and field sessions), the aim of which is to practice reacting to especially dangerous animal diseases and readiness, and also to identify possible aspects that need improvement and additional needs.

The AFB also has experience with fighting especially dangerous animal diseases from the past 10 years with fighting the African swine fever and the bird flu.

What is the foot-and-mouth disease?

The foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) is an extremely infectious viral disease that affects domestic and wild even-toed ungulates and which is characterised by blisters on the mucous membrane inside the mouth and on the tongue, in the nose, between the hoof, near the hoof and on the mammary gland and sometimes, especially in young animals, by severe myocardial and skeletal muscle dystrophy.

Which animals may catch the foot-and-mouth disease? What are the symptoms?

Bovines are mainly susceptible to the FMD, but it may affect also pigs, sheep, goats and many wild even-toed ungulates.

In bovines:

- fever, loss of appetite, shivering, decline in milk production for 2–3 consecutive days;
- increased salivation, sound characteristic of chewing;
- limping, not putting weight on the affected limb;
- blisters on the nose, lips, between the hoof and on the mammary gland;
- sores appear after the blisters rupture.

- Complications: sores on the tongue, inflammation of the sores, disfigurement of the hoof, mastitis and permanent decline in milk production, myocardial inflammation, abortion, permanently reduced body mass, loss of body temperature regulation (panting);
- calves usually do not develop blisters on the mucous membrane of the mouth and tongue. During the disease they experience bloody diarrhoea, myocardial and skeletal muscle dystrophy.

In pigs:

- fever;
- limping and the keratin cover of the hoof may come off, especially if the pigs are kept on concrete floor;
- blisters appear often on the pressure points of the limbs, especially on the wrist joints;
- vesicular sores on the nose and dry sores on the tongue;
- piglet deathrate is often high.

In sheep and goats:

- fever;
- limping;
- lighter sores in the mouth;
- blisters between and on the edges of hooves and in the mouth may remain undetected;
- decline in milk production in sheep/goats that are milked;
- death of a young animal may have no clinical symptoms.

Where is the foot-and-mouth disease spreading?

The FMD is spreading in several countries in Africa, Middle East, Asia and South America. In Europe, it was diagnosed in Germany, Hungary and Slovakia in 2025. The last instance in Estonia was identified in 1982.

How does the foot-and-mouth disease spread?

The two main ways of contracting the disease is by breathing in the virus particles in the air and by eating feed that is contaminated with the virus.

Compared to oral infection, all animals require a smaller dose of the virus to be infected via the respiratory tract.

Bovines usually contract the disease via the respiratory tract and pigs by mouth, for example by eating feed contaminated with the pathogen.

Other ways the virus spreads: through damaged skin or mucous membrane, damages to the feet and trauma caused by milking equipment; artificial insemination; equipment.

Direct contact between animals – the disease is transmitted most likely if an infected animal has direct contact with healthy animals.

Mechanical transmission: with footwear, clothes, machinery, etc.

Animal produce: milk, meat.

Spreading by wind: virus found in the exhaled air may spread by wind. This is more likely if the exhaled air includes a large amount of the virus and there are certain weather conditions present (higher air humidity, cooler weather, consistent wind, smooth terrain or a body of water).

The virus is secreted from the body through saliva, milk, excrement and urine in about four days before the symptoms appear and the secretion may continue for several months after the animal has recovered. Pigs may contract the disease by eating contaminated feed waste.

Can the foot-and-mouth disease also spread via wild animals?

Yes, the FMD may also spread via wild animals, although this is not the main method of spreading. Wild animals, especially wild boar and deer may carry the virus and spread it, but they are not as susceptible to the virus as agricultural animals are.

The FMD reaching the wild animal population may make the fight against the disease more difficult because it is harder to observe and control wild animals. Thus, it is important to limit the contact between agricultural animals and wild animals, and implement biosafety measures.

How is it possible to restrict the spreading of the foot-and-mouth disease?

A farm should have a biosafety plan which describes the implemented biosafety measures. All workers must be aware of the measures and it should be observed that everyone working at the farm follow the biosafety measures diligently.

What are the biosafety measures?

- Restrict access to the farm – entrance is allowed only in case of need and for authorised persons.
- Avoid moving between farms, incl. sharing tools and machinery with other farms.
- Disinfect all footwear and tools, machinery before and after entering the farm.
- Avoid bringing foreign animals, feed or straw bales to the farm's territory without checking its origin.
- Make sure all workers are familiar with the biosafety measures and follow these every day.
- People who arrive from abroad are not permitted entry to animal housing before 48 hours have passed from their arrival in Estonia.
- Keep the animal brought to the cattle separate from the cattle animals.
- Separate the ill animal from healthy animals.
- Use pest control for rodents and insects.
- Make sure wild and stray animals cannot enter animal housing and farm territory.
- Observe the health of the animals daily and in case of any suspicion contact a veterinary specialist immediately.

Is the disease dangerous for humans?

In general, people do not catch the foot-and-mouth disease. However, people who have contact with sick animals may contract the disease and may develop light symptoms. These symptoms may be exhaustion, fever and blisters on hands. If you develop any symptoms, contact your family physician immediately.

Is there a vaccine for the foot-and-mouth disease?

Yes, there is a vaccine for the FMD. However, keep in mind that a vaccine that protects from one serotype does not protect against the other FMD serotypes.

Why are infectious animals not vaccinated?

Preventive vaccination is not used in Europe in general. Vaccination means restrictions or prohibitions to export of animals and animal produce, many countries do not accept meat and dairy products from vaccinated animals.

How can animals contract the foot-and-mouth disease?

Two main ways of contracting the disease is by breathing in the virus particles in the air and by eating feed that is contaminated with the virus. The disease also spreads by direct contact with another animal, by human activity (footwear, clothes, machinery, etc.), by animal produce (meat, dairy) and by wind.

How do I recognise if my animals are infected? Which symptoms should raise alarm?

Main symptoms of the foot-and-mouth disease are:

- fever;
- loss of appetite, exhaustion;
- blisters in the mouth, between the hooves, near the hooves, on the mammary gland;
- decline in milk production.

If you notice any symptoms on your animals, immediately inform your veterinarian.

Can other animals be carriers of the virus?

It is not known that animals not susceptible to the FMD would be carriers of the virus (dogs and cats are not infected).

How often does the Board check susceptible farms? Is the foot-and-mouth disease analysed?

The Board checks pig farms at least twice a year. Selection of other animal housings to be checked for the calendar year is prepared by the animal health and wellbeing department based on the risks of the animal health segment that depend on the herd sizes, production trends and volumes, and information on animal health and animal protection breaches received from the Agricultural Registers and Information Board (ARIB).

The Agriculture and Food Board inspects bovines for three serotypes of the FMD (A, O, Asia-1), the number of inspections is 200 animals per year.

What is the general situation like with biosafety in Estonian farms?

Biosafety measures implemented in pig farms are on a good level. Biosafety measures need some improving at bovine and sheep-goat farms.

How many animals could possibly contract the foot-and-mouth disease in Estonia?

As at 01.04.2025:

[Data on animals in Estonia as at 01.04.25.pdf | 76.01 KB | pdf](#)

Slovakia declared a state of emergency. Could this happen in Estonia as well?

The Government of the Republic will declare a state of emergency if the spreading of the FMD requires this in the future.

What happens if the disease is suspected at a farm?

In case of suspected FMD outbreak, the animal keeper must immediately inform the veterinarian serving the livestock farming company or the respective office or region of the Agriculture and Food Board. The veterinarian must inform the Agriculture and Food Board.

The AFB sets restrictions for the farm with the suspected disease outbreak and, if necessary, a temporary restriction zone around the outbreak point. In case of suspected FMD, it is prohibited to take animals off the farm or to bring them in, to take potentially infected materials off the farm, to kill livestock susceptible to the FMD on site for food, and movement of people and machinery must be supervised.

What happens next in this farm/company?

All animals are slaughtered and AS Vireen organises appropriate disposal of the animals. Then, the AFB organises a complete cleaning and disinfection of the rooms where livestock was kept followed by a 21-day halt period. Scientists from the Estonian University of Life Sciences help to identify how the pathogen might have entered the farm by conducting an epidemiological survey.

Why are the animals slaughtered?

The foot-and-mouth disease is an especially dangerous animal disease and causes high infection and death rates among agricultural bovines, sheep, goats and pigs. To eliminate the possibility of the disease spreading all animals are executed.

In case of an outbreak quarantine is imposed, infected and suspected infected animals are slaughtered and disposed of. There is no cure for this disease. There are FMD vaccines available which help to suppress the disease and protect animals from it (the efficiency and duration of the vaccine may vary).

Are sheep, goats, pigs and bovines in three-kilometre radius of the infected farm also slaughtered as a preventive measure?

Slaughtering of agricultural animals around the infection site is a possible preventive measure for FMD. Whether this measure is used and to what extent is decided by the AFB based on a risk assessment if the disease is found.

Is the foot-and-mouth disease dangerous for cats and dogs?

No.

Has the disease spread among wild animals in any country?

Currently no instances of FMD have been found among wild animals in relation to the instances in Europe or elsewhere in Europe.

Numerous studies conducted among the wild animals near the disease zones in Europe have not identified FMD in wild animals. Slovakia, Hungary and Austria have prohibited entering forests and hunting in certain areas to restrict the virus from spreading. Hunting is continued for study purposes.

Currently there is no dangerous disease spreading among our roe deer.

What happens if the disease should enter Estonia?

Will the animal keepers be compensated?

The FMD is an especially dangerous disease and the costs related to eliminating the disease in the outbreak zones (inspecting the animals, sampling and other supervisory measures as well as sample studies) are covered from the state budget. Animals slaughtered according to the precept of a supervisory official, destroyed feed and costs for disposing of the dead animal carcasses are compensated by the state as well.

If a dairy farm is infected, are the milk and dairy products safe to consume? Same question for dairy farms within the protection and/or supervisory zone.

People generally do not get infected with the FMD, milk from the outbreak zone is destroyed, milk from the restriction zone may be used after thermal processing (ultra-high-temperature processing or ultra-pasteurization).

How could the foot-and-mouth disease reach Estonia? By car wheels, wind, products, etc.

The likeliest scenario is that the disease could arrive here with contaminated transportation means, contaminated feed, people or infected animals.

Why must all animals be slaughtered? Will the animals living in buildings next door also be slaughtered?

Since the disease can spread from the outbreak zone easily and quickly, all animals susceptible to the FMD must be slaughtered.

If an animal falls ill, are the animals of other animal keepers also at risk?

We ask the animal keepers in the same area to keep their animals closed indoors and avoid contact with other animals or third persons. If you notice any symptoms on your animals, immediately inform your veterinary specialist.

If the Agriculture and Food Board should impose restrictions to the livestock housing, how is keeping to the restrictions supervised? Should the animal keeper be ready for an inspector coming by?

The Board may ask that the animals are kept indoors to protect them from being infected. Since the animals will be slaughtered in case of falling ill, we hope that the animal keepers understand how serious this disease is. We map all the animal keepers in the vicinity of the farm/company and the Board makes sure that the said animal keepers would follow the Board's instructions.

Will an export restriction be set in Estonia if the foot-and-mouth disease is discovered? To what extent?

This depends greatly on the specific situation.

What happens with the slaughtered animals?

The slaughtered animals are disposed of at an animal byproduct factory or are buried.

In which instances are the animals buried?

If the animal byproduct factory is located too far from the outbreak zone or the number of slaughtered animals is too large so that disposal at the factory would take too much time. Selection of each burial site and burial requires a decision which is not made in haste.

Who organises the disposal of the slaughtered animals?

The Agriculture and Food Board together with its partners organises the disposal.

Who covers the costs related with disposing of the animals?

In case of an especially dangerous animal disease, the state covers the costs related with eliminating the outbreak zone (the percentage to be covered depends on the situation).

If the infected animals were kept inside the farm, how is the livestock keeping area made safe after eliminating the outbreak zone?

The farm will be systematically washed and disinfected.

Is it possible to find out how the disease reached the farm?

The University of Life Sciences will conduct an epidemiological study to identify the spreading of the disease.

If the infected animals were kept outdoors, how is the livestock keeping area made safe after eliminating the outbreak zone?

In this case the risk assessment is used as a basis. For instance, herding may be restricted by setting a herding prohibition period.

When can new animals start using the area?

Again, in this case the risk assessment is used as a basis. For instance, after three months have passed from the elimination of the outbreak zone, but this depends on the weather because subzero temperatures favour the virus surviving in the environment.

When can new animals move into the farm?

Animals may be brought to the farm once at least 21 days have passed from the disinfection.