



February 2023

Foot-and-mouth disease preparedness and response information for the retail sector

Foot-and-mouth disease – the facts

Foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) is a serious and highly contagious disease that affects cloven-hoofed animals including cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, deer and camelids (camels, alpacas and llamas).

Australia is FMD-free and has been for over 100 years.

Most importantly, FMD is not a human disease, and the disease cannot be transmitted to humans through consuming commercially produced meat, milk, or dairy products. These items would continue to be safe to consume in an FMD outbreak.

The FMD virus is carried by live animals, meat and dairy products, soil, bones, and untreated hides. It can remain infectious in the environment for several weeks, and possibly longer in the presence of soil, manure and dried animal secretions.

FMD is currently spreading through Indonesia and other parts of Asia. Governments and industry are on high alert for any incursion of this disease into Australia.

You can read more about FMD at agriculture.gov.au/famd.

How we would respond to FMD in Australia

Australia has well practiced and documented response arrangements in place for emergency animal diseases including FMD. If the disease is confirmed in Australia, the [AUSVETPLAN FMD Strategy](https://animalhealthaustralia.com.au/ausvetplan) (animalhealthaustralia.com.au/ausvetplan) will be triggered. This describes the nationally agreed policy to contain, control and eradicate FMD and to re-establish Australia's free status. This would be achieved by the humane destruction and disposal of infected and at-risk animals in combination with other strategies, including vaccination under some circumstances. AUSVETPLAN includes:

- information on movement controls for live animals, commencing with a national livestock standstill (see below)
- information about movement controls that would be put in place for meat, milk and dairy products

- requirements for product tracing from infected and other high-risk premises (trace-back and trace-forward)
- information on the possible withdrawal of animal products that are likely to be contaminated
- recommended movement controls for non-susceptible animals (note that there are no recommended movement controls for meat from non-susceptible species).

If there was an incursion, Chief Veterinary Officers for the Australian, state and territory governments, together with the Director of the CSIRO Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness and peak livestock industry representatives will come together as the Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases to coordinate and make decisions on the national response.

National livestock standstill – what it means

Following the diagnosis or strong suspicion of FMD in Australia, a national livestock standstill would be put in place prohibiting all new movements of live susceptible animals unless an emergency permit has been issued. The purpose is to restrict the spread of FMD and allow authorities time to conduct surveillance activities and trace the movement of affected livestock. The standstill would last for a minimum of 72 hours.

A national livestock standstill is likely to be implemented under state and territory government legislation. It only applies to FMD-susceptible animals, however, state or territory governments may also apply movement controls over other things such as vehicles, equipment and FMD-susceptible animal products (e.g. meat, milk, carcasses and offal) during this period, based on risk assessment.

Although a national livestock standstill would be a coordinated approach to movement restrictions across all states and territories, implementation and cessation of the standstill may vary in timing between jurisdictions.

Livestock already in transit at the start of a national livestock standstill may continue their journey within a state or territory without a permit, provided that:

- the journey did not commence in another jurisdiction and the destination is not in another jurisdiction, and
- the journey can be completed within 4 hours of declaration of the standstill, and
- the movements are from farm to farm or feedlot; or to an abattoir; or livestock returning to their property or place of pick-up.

Once the national livestock standstill has been lifted, state or territory government will manage the movement of FMD susceptible animals, vehicles, equipment and other materials based on risk assessment. It is recommended that vehicle movements between farms should be minimal and farm biosecurity procedures adhered to. Further information can be found in the [AUSVETPLAN Decontamination Manual](#) and farmbiosecurity.com.au.

Impacts of a national livestock standstill on food supply chains

During a national livestock standstill, there will be a reduced supply of livestock to processing facilities across the country.

During this time, meat, dairy and offal products from both FMD-susceptible and non-FMD-susceptible species might not make it to supermarket shelves due to movement controls.

Should FMD be confirmed, it is possible that the national livestock standstill will be extended for more than 72 hours as authorities embark on a program of tracing, testing, containment and control activities. In states or territories where there is no FMD, movement controls implemented by the relevant state and territory government may allow animals to be transported to processing facilities. It is likely that the food supply chain will be affected by limited movements of livestock.

Tracing of animals and animal products from infected premises

Tracing of animals and animal products that may have entered or left infected premises is important to determine the source and extent of infection.

Trace-forward will be a priority to determine the potential spread or extent of the disease, while trace-back helps determine the source of the disease.

Trace-forward involves finding animals and products that moved from an infected premises at least 14 days **after** the first reported case (index case) was detected, and up to the time that quarantine was imposed. Trace-back will determine movements that occurred from an infected premises at least 14 days **before** the onset of clinical signs in the first reported case (index case) on that property.

Withdrawing products from supermarkets

Although there is no risk to people's health from eating FMD affected meat or dairy products, in some circumstances, products may need to be withdrawn from sale at supermarkets for animal disease control purposes. Food products from properties diagnosed with FMD would not be commercially available, as they present a risk in spreading the disease.

It will be critical that the public understands that these withdrawal activities are not related to human food safety risks, but the withdrawals are clearly communicated as livestock disease control activities.

Food safety information in relation to FMD is available from [Food Standards Australia New Zealand \(foodstandards.gov.au\)](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au):

- The 'Australian standard for the hygienic production and transportation of meat and meat products for human consumption: AS 4696:2007' states that animals showing signs of acute disease should be condemned at ante-mortem or post-mortem inspection and should not be further processed for human consumption.
- The 'Primary Production and Processing Standard for Dairy Products' under the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code states that milk for human consumption must only be sourced from healthy animals.

If required, supermarkets and other supply chains will be contacted by government representatives to identify food products that need to be withdrawn and coordinate the bio-secure disposal of these products. The decision to withdraw food products from supermarkets and other supply chains will be based on risk assessments.

Prohibition of feeding animal products to pigs

Many FMD outbreaks overseas have originated from pigs being fed prohibited pig feed (also referred to as swill) containing contaminated animal products, or meat scraps and bones from infected animals. Feeding of, or allowing pigs access to, prohibited pig feed is illegal in all Australian states and territories to prevent an incursion.

Currently, milk, milk products or milk by-products either of Australian provenance or legally imported for stockfeed use into Australia, can be legally fed to pigs as an exemption under the nationally agreed prohibited pig feed definition. However, feeding of these products will be prohibited during an outbreak to prevent further spread of FMD to animals.

Increased awareness of swill-feeding prohibitions, as well as reassurance on the safety of meat for human consumption, would form part of a media campaign.

Loss of export markets

An FMD outbreak in Australia would lead to an immediate halt of exports of animal and animal by-products as we would no longer be able to meet the certification requirements of importing countries.

Products originally bound for export and not deemed contaminated may be diverted to domestic supply. This may result in an oversupply of some products which may drive down prices for producers, retailers, and consumers. Any oversupply may remain for some time until Australia has regained its FMD free status and export trade recovers.

Consumer Confidence

It is difficult to predict how consumers will react in the event of an FMD outbreak. Consumer demand will be shaped by social and economic factors. Some may think it is too risky to purchase these products, though this apprehension may be balanced by the price of preferred products and effective food safety messaging.

Government communication strategies

Any outbreak of FMD in Australia, even if on a small scale, would be emotionally and financially challenging for affected producers, associated industries and local communities. Producers in particular will be coming to grips with the loss of their animals, and genetics that have been established over many generations, as well as the financial impact.

In addition, there would be a high level of media coverage, which would place more pressure on primary producers and relevant industries. Consumers would also likely be alarmed by media reports focussing on food security and potential shortage of meat, dairy and by-products.

The federal, state and territory governments recognise the need to provide correct and nationally consistent information to affected stakeholders quickly. Pre-prepared communication plans and processes are in place between federal, state and territory governments to provide accurate and consistent information to industry, the supply chain and the public through a range of channels and forums, including the **outbreak.gov.au** website.

Moving towards FMD freedom

After the eradication of FMD, we would need to demonstrate that Australia is free to regain export market access. This would be achieved through thorough testing and surveillance of animals over an extended period, with evidence provided to the World Organisation for Animal Health, as well as negotiation with individual trading partners. The timeframe for importing countries to accept Australian exports again will vary and often supporting information is required. Overseas experience is that it may take years for countries to re-establish trade with some trading partners.

Australian governments and peak industry groups would continue to work with supermarkets and other domestic retailers during the recovery period to restore the supply chain and consumer confidence.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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