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Foot and mouth disease — Does it affect humans? ^[1]

Hi Alice,

I was curious as to whether the disease foot and mouth that was spreading through Great Britain has any effect on humans. Thank You.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Foot and mouth disease (FMD) is a painful, highly infectious disease that affects split hoofed animals such as cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, deer, llamas, alpacas, etc. If you're wondering if humans can get sick with the disease, then the answer is very, very rarely, if at all. While the disease continues to impact livestock in parts of the world, the US eradicated the disease in 1929 and the last case in humans was reported in the United Kingdom in 1966. Experts also believe that some cases from the past may have been incorrectly diagnosed. Though similar in name, a condition called hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common, mild infection that occurs only in humans and bears little resemblance to FMD. HFMD is caused by a different virus than FMD and can't be transmitted to animals.

FMD is a harsh and debilitating infection that causes fever and blisters in the feet and mouths of infected animals within one to ten days of exposure to the virus. Animals sick with FMD are usually very fatigued and have a hard time eating or moving around. FMD doesn't affect horses, dogs, or cats, and there's even some disagreement among experts about whether humans can actually contract it. Those who believe that it's possible note that suspected cases of humans getting FMD are extremely rare and involve people who've had close contact with infected animals — the FMD virus is spread through contact with the fluid from the blisters, saliva, milk and excrement of the sick animals. Even among the rare cases of FMD in humans, no person-to-person transmission has been reported.

HFMD, on the other hand (pun intended!), is a highly contagious, yet mild infection that frequently occurs among children, since they're often in close quarters such as in day cares. When a person is infected, the disease can spread through their nose and throat discharge (saliva, mucus, etc.), blisters, and feces. This means that the disease can spread easily if someone breathes the air after an infected person coughs, touches the infected person, or shares objects

with the virus on them, such as toys and tables. The most common symptoms include fever, reduced appetite, and minor weakness (similar to the flu) and often occur three to six days after infection. Painful mouth sores and a rash on the skin of the hands or soles of feet can also occur in some cases. If symptoms last more than ten days or the child's drinking or eating is impacted, it's recommended to contact a health care provider. To learn more about how to prevent and treat HFMD, you might want to check out the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) [2] website.

While FMD and HFMD may sound similar, they're very distinct diseases that likely pose little to no risk (particularly in the case of HFMD) of transmission between humans and animals. And while FMD only rarely impacts humans, its devastating toll on livestock and agriculture has led to trade restrictions in many places to reduce the spread of the virus.

Thanks for your thoughtful question, which hopefully cleared up any confusion about the condition!

Alice!

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