St Helena Government

Foot & Mouth Disease (FMD) Q&A

Updated Tuesday, 10 March 2026

Please note that this document is subject to change.

Some answers are based on our best understanding of the situation at this time, but may be subject to revision at a later date.

Question	Answer
What is Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)?	FMD is a highly contagious viral disease affecting cloven-hoofed animals (cattle, sheep, pigs, goats etc), causing blisters and erosions in the mouth, nose, feet and teats.
How does the virus spread?	Animals can become infected through inhalation, ingestion and direct contact. Infected animals shed the virus through breath, saliva, mucus, milk and faeces, including before symptoms appear. The disease spreads most commonly through the movement of infected animals. In sheep the symptoms can be absent or very mild, and undetected infected sheep can be an important source of infection. It also spreads via contaminated materials (vehicles, clothing, footwear), and can travel long distances through the air—up to 60km over land and 300km by sea.
How long does the virus stay in the environment?	Under favourable conditions, the FMD virus can survive for long periods. It can persist in the environment and in contaminated fodder for up to one month, depending on the temperature and other conditions.
What conditions favour the virus?	Heat, sunlight and disinfectants will destroy the virus, whereas cold and darkness tend to keep it alive. It is preserved by refrigeration and freezing and progressively inactivated by temperatures above 50^0C.
Does the virus affect humans?	Human infection is extremely rare and requires close contact with infected animals. Transmission to humans has occurred and resulted in blisters on hands from manipulating infected animals or inside the mouth from drinking infected milk.
Is FMD the same as Hand, Foot and Mouth disease in humans?	No. Hand, Foot and Mouth disease (HFMD) in humans is unrelated. FMD is often confused with HFMD, which is particularly common in small children, due to the similar symptoms. However, the diseases are not related to each other.
When was the problem of increased spread of FMD identified in South Africa (SA)?	Since early 2026, SA has seen widespread FMD outbreaks. On 13 February 2026, the government declared it a national disaster and introduced vaccination, traceability, movement controls, and expanded testing.

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Why are the events in SA a concern for St Helena?	Rising cases in SA increase the risk of infected meat or dairy reaching St Helena as the Island currently import a range of meat and dairy products originating in SA. Additionally, members of our community visit SA for holidays and visit farms and animal reserves. Many of our visitors are from SA as well and travellers to St Helena can increase the risk of FMD reaching the island. Therefore, local controls are needed to reduce risk from imports and travellers to the island.
What are the impacts of a FMD outbreak on St Helena?	Although not a human health threat, the effects of an outbreak of FMD at St Helena's agriculture scale if not able to be controlled quickly would be enormous to the commercial and small holder livestock enterprises as a whole and the support enterprises that depend on local meat. Direct effects would stem from culling of animals, disruption to production associated with the disease and disease response activities. In addition, it is expected that there could be indirect effects on sectors such as tourism as a result of disease response activities and restrictions on movement in the countryside etc. At the community level, impacts could range from a breakdown of normal community activities, during quarantine and people movement restrictions.
What measures are being put in place to restrict the disease reaching St Helena?	St Helena has: – prohibited imports of cloven-hoofed animals originating from South Africa through a legislation change. – increased biosecurity measures at ports (e.g., revised landing process for persons from ships/yachts and introduction of footbaths, awareness raising about biosecurity measures in place). – increased awareness of the risk of the disease reaching the island (through use of information leaflets for travellers to the Island and this will be followed with FMD specific information on disease symptoms and biosecurity for animal owners).
What imports are prohibited?	- All live imports and their germplasm i.e. living genetic material, such as semen and embryos of cloven hoofed animals. – Fresh, (chilled or frozen) meat from cloven-hoofed animals. – Meat products which have not been heat-treated to at least 80°C throughout the product. – Dairy products that are not processed using a Ultra High Temperature (UHT) process (to 135°C or above)

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	This ban that has been established for the above-mentioned imports applies only to products originating from, produced in, or repackaged in South Africa.
Is there a process in law to enable the prohibition?	Yes. The First Schedule of the Customs (Export and Import) Control Regulations has been amended to include these prohibited imports.
When will this prohibition be effective from?	– Imports By Sea: after voyage 261702 of the MV *Karoline.* – Imports by Air: from 10 March 2026.
How long will the prohibition on the imports from SA last?	It is not known how long the ban will continue for and SHG will continue with this import restriction until FMD events in SA improve, and St Helena's risk assessment of this improved situation determines the ban should be lifted.
Is there any risk of infected meat or meat products already being here (from previous voyages before the prohibition)?	Yes there is always the risk that meat and dairy products originating in SA from cloven-hoofed animals could be infected with the FMD virus. Meat should not be fed to animals especially pigs. After handling meat, wash your hands thoroughly before handling susceptible animals.
Is meat safe to eat?	FMD is not a food safety concern. It cannot be transmitted to humans through consuming commercially produced meat, milk or dairy products. Commercially produced meat, milk and dairy products would continue to be safe to consume in an FMD outbreak.
Does UHT milk (boxed milk) and evaporated milk (tinned milk form part of the banned substances?	An Ultra High Temperature (UHT) process is a food processing technology that sterilises liquid food by heating it above 140 °C (284 °F). The ban therefore does not include boxed nor tinned milk.
Will yogurts be banned?	The ban does include yogurts if the originate from South Africa and have not been through a UHT process.
Will tinned meats be banned?	The ban does not include tinned meats which are typically heat treated and sterilised.
Are importers and suppliers aware of the situation?	Yes. Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Portfolio (ENRP) held discussions with local importers (merchants and hospitality businesses) last week to inform them of the ban on imports that was being proposed and discussions with them are on-going as required.
What can we do to protect St Helena from an outbreak of FMD?	Biosecurity is everyone's role and requires responsible actions by everyone. We all need to help protect our agriculture, our economy and our unique natural environment. It's not enough to rely on biosecurity inspections to stop potential pests and disease threats at our borders. When

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	buying meat and dairy products, always consider where they are coming from and whether they will meet St Helena's biosecurity and import requirements before ordering them. All visitors to the island should also play their part in helping to keep FMD and other diseases and pests out of St Helena. Any visitors to countries where FMD is present, in particular South Africa, must thoroughly clean and disinfect their footwear before departing and also wash clothes thoroughly that may have been in contact with livestock or other affected animals. If a visitor has been to a country where FMD is present, they should not enter a farm/small holding in St Helena for at least 7 days.
I have ordered items from SA that will arrive by ship or air after 10 March 2026 that are included in the prohibited list of imports, but I did this before the prohibition came into force?	Although your order of meat products produced from cloven-hoofed animals originating in South Africa was placed with a supplier prior to notification of the planned prohibition, a prohibition is in place for such imports proposed for arrival after voyage 261702 of the MV Karoline and by air after the 10 March 2026. If landed, these imports will be seized by a Customs Officer as prohibited imports and will be disposed of in such a manner as the Collector of Customs deems necessary.
I will be travelling to St Helena from Ascension and will be bringing meat and dairy products that have been imported into Ascension from South Africa. What should I do?	Before packing meat and dairy product items to be imported to St Helena from Ascension that are prohibited through the ban, whether bringing with you or exporting to family and friends on St Helena, please check that the items are eligible for import into St Helena. If they arrive without the importer being able to demonstrate that they are not prohibited imports (through clear commercial labelling to show this on the products) these imports will be seized by a Customs Officer as prohibited imports and will be disposed of in such a manner as the Collector of Customs deems necessary.
I will be travelling to St Helena from a destination where FMD occurs. What should I do?	It's important to follow the right biosecurity practices when travelling to St Helena from overseas. ENRP has advice to travellers returning from countries with FMD. [add link here to the Leaflet for Travellers]