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Prevention and control

Foot and mouth disease is an OIE notifiable disease so its occurrence has to be reported to the authorities in the country of occurrence who, in turn, will report it to the OIE.

The three important means of spread are by infected animals, via contaminated feed/swill and transfer on fomites, such as man and equipment. So, a key aspect of control is to stop these transmission routes by the application of strict control measures such as movement restriction and farm biosecurity measures. Airborne transmission is virtually uncontrollable.

To eradicate foot and mouth disease requires prompt identification and the slaughter of infected and contact herds with controlled and correct carcass disposal.

There is no treatment for foot and mouth disease. In some countries ring vaccination is allowed. In this practice all non-infected pigs and ruminants in a zone around the outbreak farm are vaccinated – the outbreak herd is still slaughtered out.

Vaccination

There are seven serotypes of foot and mouth disease virus and vaccination with one serotype only protects against infection with the same (homologous) serotype. In addition, there can be many strains within a serotype and some of these may differ enough to reduce the efficacy of a serotype homologous vaccine. Thus, if vaccination is to be used, the vaccine must be effective against the strain(s) in the area.

For pigs, vaccinal protective immunity lasts for 4-6 months and non-protected animals are being born or moved into the area. So, any vaccination programme needs at least two, but preferably three or more, doses a year.

Once foot and mouth disease is established in a pig population it can be difficult to manage by vaccination. For example, foot and mouth disease was introduced into Taiwan in 1977 and after 15 years of vaccination it had not been eliminated from the country.

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