agriculture, land reform & rural development
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UPDATE ON FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE OUTBREAK THE IN EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE

The Department of Agriculture declared a Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Disease Management Area (DMA) on 26 July 2024, which includes parts of the Kouga and Kou-Kamma Municipalities in the Eastern Cape Province. The primary aim of the DMA is to prevent the outward spread of the FMD outbreaks that have affected the area since May 2024.

There have been no reports of the disease spreading beyond the DMA boundaries, a positive indication that the control measures are effective. The Department appreciates the compliance of the farming community and the general public in the affected area with the DMA movement restrictions.

There are currently 33 farms in the Humansdorp area and one farm in the East London area that have been confirmed positive and vaccinated for FMD, including the farm under investigation in the previous update. Any reports of suspected lesions continue to be thoroughly investigated, with another case still pending test results to determine its status.

An additional 36 farms have been pre-emptively vaccinated to reduce the severity of clinical signs should these farms become infected. A total of 96,906 cattle and 635 sheep have been vaccinated since the outbreak began in the Eastern Cape in May 2024.

The second round of vaccinations has commenced, beginning with farms where clinical symptoms have been observed. Five farms reported clinical symptoms, particularly among highly stressed first-time calvers and calves born approximately two weeks after vaccination, which are currently transitioning from milk to pellets. Thirteen farms located near those exhibiting symptoms have been identified as priority sites for vaccination. To date, six farms have been vaccinated, with a total of 11,949 animals receiving the vaccine. The remaining seven farms are scheduled for vaccination next week.

The Department of Agriculture is concerned about the recurrence of clinical signs on some farms within the DMA that were previously infected and/or vaccinated. This suggests ongoing virus circulation on these farms, and the risk of outward spread remains high. The importance of biosecurity cannot be overemphasised!

Farmers from infected and vaccinated farms must take all necessary precautions to prevent the disease from spreading from their properties. Similarly, farmers whose farms have not been infected must maintain strict biosecurity measures to prevent infection. Movement of live animals, people, vehicles, and equipment should be minimised. When such movements are necessary, proper cleaning and disinfection must be carried out before entering and leaving farms.

In addition to the control measures within the Eastern Cape Province DMA, the July 2024 Gazette Notice stipulates that cloven-hoofed livestock throughout South Africa may only be moved if accompanied by a health declaration from the owner, attesting to the animals' health at the time of movement. Furthermore, any cattle, sheep, or goats newly introduced to a farm must be kept separate from resident herds for at least 28 days. Although this has been a legal requirement since October 2022, its importance is being reiterated.

The Department of Agriculture strongly advises all livestock farmers across the country to limit animal movement as much as possible. Cloven-hoofed animals should not be moved unless absolutely necessary, to provide an opportunity to identify and quarantine further undetected, affected properties and thus prevent any further spread of the disease. The significance of the incubation period for FMD cannot be overemphasised. During this period, animals may appear healthy while shedding the virus and not yet showing clinical signs of the disease.

Farmers in the whole country are also again urged to observe stringent biosecurity measures on their farms to protect their herds from infection. Section 11 of the Animal Diseases Act imposes a legal duty on animal owners or managers to take all reasonable steps to prevent their animals from becoming infected and to prevent the spread of any disease from their animals or land to others.

Essential biosecurity measures include:

- Any cattle, sheep, or goats newly introduced to a farm must be kept separate from resident herds for at least 28 days.
- Only introduce animals accompanied by a health declaration from known clean farms.
- Prevent nose-to-nose contact of farm animals with animals outside the farm.
- Maintain secure farm boundaries and restrict access for people and vehicles as much as possible.
- Ensure that farm personnel have no contact with animals outside the property.
- Provide clean clothing and washing facilities to all visitors and personnel as well as thorough cleaning and disinfection of any vehicles and farming implements that are brought onto a property etc.
- These and additional measures should be refined during regular contact with the responsible private and state veterinarian and animal health technician.

FMD is a controlled animal disease under the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No. 35 of 1984), which mandates certain control measures, such as isolation and movement restrictions, enforced by Veterinary Services.

Any suspicious clinical symptoms (such as salivation, blisters in the mouth, limping, or hoof lesions) should be reported immediately to the local State Veterinarian, and such animals must not be moved under any circumstances.

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