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Waging war against Foot and mouth disease a top priority for Minister Steenhuisen and department

The Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, today expressed confidence in the national strategy to combat Foot and mouth disease (FMD), highlighting that the department and the Ministerial Advisory Task Team are hard at work implementing a decisive, fact-driven blueprint for recovery.

“South Africa now has a realistic and technically sound roadmap to realise its goal of FMD-free status with vaccination, a crucial step for restoring confidence in export markets and stabilising this R80 billion livestock industry,” Minister Steenhuisen said. “This will however take time. We need cooperation of the industry to ensure that we manage to control the disease within a short space of time.”

He emphasises that this science-backed plan is essential to protect national food security. The Department of Agriculture has embarked on a new policy direction, FMD Free with Vaccination, which stems from the Bosberaad that was convened in July 2025 in collaboration with the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), where over 400 stakeholders from Government, academia, industry and research institutions came together to path the way forward. The Bosberaad recommended a phased, multidisciplinary approach, combining stronger existing controls with the Progressive Control Pathway Framework. Crucial to this approach is securing reliable FMD vaccine supply, accelerating livestock identification, managing movement controls, expanding diagnostic capacity, and intensifying awareness campaigns. Medium- to long-term priorities include infrastructure investment, regional cooperation and sustained funding for veterinary services and research.

Plan to freedom

Following the FMD Bosberaad, Minister Steenhuisen established the Ministerial Advisory Task Team on Animal Disease Prevention and Control.

“The team is finalising a strategy to reduce FMD incidents by about 70% in high-risk areas for the next 24 months; achieving 90% vaccination coverage in target animal populations in communal areas, commercial farms and feedlot areas and 100% vaccination in dairy cows. Certified compartments and progressive vaccination zones to facilitate safe trade will also be established,” Minister Steenhuisen indicated.

Close to 950 000 animals have already been vaccinated over the last few months with government-procured vaccine stock.

The vaccination process is strategically phased, starting with the highest-risk areas and moving to lower-risk areas later, starting with mass vaccination in KZN and Gauteng targeting feedlots, commercial and communal farmers, which will commence the beginning of February 2026. This will be followed by vaccinations in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, and then North West and Eastern Cape. There is an urgent need to protect FMD-free areas by creating protection zones in Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Western Cape.

The Botswana Vaccine Institute (BVI) has confirmed its ability to supply 1 000 000 doses per month starting mid-January 2026, which will enable South Africa to complete vaccination in critical areas in KZN, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and parts of Gauteng.

The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) is on track with a mid-scale manufacturing facility. While fundraising for the main factory is ongoing, the ARC aims to produce 20 000 multivalent vaccine doses by Q4 of 2025/26 and 150 000 to 200 000 doses by Q1/Q2 of 2026/2027.

The diagnostic capacity at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Laboratory will be increased through the employment of additional veterinary technologists. The task team is also exploring the use of other laboratories to alleviate pressure from the Onderstepoort laboratory. Diagnostic kits and vaccines will be imported as and when required. Awareness campaigns will be rolled out across the country in partnership with industry and farmer associations; the Biosecurity Hub of the University of Pretoria will coordinate the awareness campaigns together with the Provincial Departments of Agriculture.

In all provinces, the department will work with the South African Police Services (SAPS) and other law enforcement agencies; the briefing of the law enforcement agencies will occur within the third week of January. Unemployed Animal Health graduates will also be trained and utilised during the implementation of the vaccination programme.

The department has noted statements from the Milk Producers Organisation (MPO), indicating their concern regarding the availability of vaccines for the dairy sector. In September, the dairy industry was provided with the opportunity to order and purchase vaccines but didn’t take up the offer. When

FMD then started to spread across dairy farms, the MPO negotiated through the Red Meat Industry Services (RMIS) to purchase vaccines from feedlots to assist the dairy farmers.

During October, a further 50 000 doses were made available at the Botswana Vaccine Institute (BVI), and the MPO then received first option to purchase the vaccines for the dairy industry, which they did. Only 20 000 doses have been used to date and we urge the MPO to vaccinate with speed to ensure all doses have been administered by the end of December.

Apart from the vaccine arrangements, the MPO have also met with the MTT separately, and Government fully understands the impact on the industry.

The first two months of the new year will see important developments in the implementation of the plan.

The Livestock Identification and Traceability System (LITS) will be implemented by the second week of January. This system was developed by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and there are already provinces that have started implementing the system. The system, through geo-location, will help us track the movement of vaccinated animals.

The task team is busy developing a Section 10 scheme in terms of the Animal Diseases Act, 1984 (Act No. 35 of 1984). This scheme will be announced by the end of January and will set parameters within the dairy and the feedlot industries for the vaccination programme.

Regulations will be reviewed regarding the emergency importation of vaccines, quarantine measures and branding of animals in line with this new policy direction. The task team is also developing a new incentivised post-vaccination branding system.

To ensure more funds are being directed to the fight against FMD, all unspent Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP) funding will be directed towards biosecurity and FMD control. Going forward, 5% of the CASP funding will be prioritised for FMD.

Current disease status

Currently, FMD remains active in seven provinces, namely, North West, Free State, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, Western Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). KZN is regarded as the epicentre of the disease.

Western Cape recorded a single outbreak linked to the illegal movement of animals from infected areas.

Until recently, Eastern Cape and Limpopo have successfully managed to control the disease. This week, however, four cases of FMD were confirmed in Limpopo—two confirmed cases in the Waterberg District, one in the Vhembe District, and one in Alldays.

Measures are in place to prevent further spread, including considering the establishment of a protection zone in Eastern Cape to act as a buffer.

The total number of confirmed outbreaks in KwaZulu-Natal has increased to 207. Of these, 187 outbreaks are still unresolved, while 20 outbreaks have been resolved and officially closed with the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). Outbreaks were initially limited to communal dip tanks and small-scale farms but have spread to commercial beef and dairy herds in recent months. There are also five affected game reserves, all located near one another. Complete resolution of this event is unlikely due to the FMD carrier status of the buffalo populations in these affected game reserves.

An outbreak of FMD SAT2 was detected in April 2025 in the Gert Sibande Municipality in Mpumalanga which was linked to the outbreaks in KwaZulu-Natal. A total of 30 confirmed outbreaks have been reported in Mpumalanga. These outbreaks have affected the municipalities of Dr Pixley ka Isaka Seme, Dipaleseng, Victor Khanye, Govan Mbeki, eMakhazeni and Steve Tshwete. Two abattoirs in Mpumalanga was designated by the Director: Animal Health for the controlled slaughter of FMD-positive and/or vaccinated cattle and ten farms/feedlots were approved for controlled slaughter.

In April 2025, an outbreak of FMD was detected in the West Rand Municipality in Gauteng. The SAT2 serotype was identified, which is the same as the strain of virus circulating in the KZN outbreak. In October 2025, a SAT1 strain of the FMD virus was identified at one of the feedlots located in Gauteng. This virus is not related to the SAT1 virus circulating in KZN.

Outbreaks were reported in Ekurhuleni, Lesedi, Midvaal, Mogale City, Randfontein, Westonaria, Emfuleni, Merafong City and City of Tshwane local municipalities. Currently, there is a total of 105 outbreaks reported to the WOAH in Gauteng, including communal kraals, feedlots, beef farms and dairy farms. Two abattoirs in Gauteng were designated by the Director: Animal Health for the controlled slaughter of FMD-positive and/or vaccinated cattle, and 16 farms/feedlots were approved for controlled slaughter.

In June 2025, outbreaks of FMD were reported in North West in the JB Marks Local Municipality. Additional FMD outbreaks were confirmed in Kgetlengrivier, Madibeng, City of Matlosana and Kagisano/Molopo local municipalities. A total of 50 outbreaks on mainly beef farms and some informal holdings were reported to the WOAH. One abattoir in North West was designated by the Director: Animal Health for the controlled slaughter of FMD-positive and/or vaccinated cattle and nine farms/feedlots were approved for controlled slaughter.

An outbreak of SAT2 FMD was confirmed on a commercial farm in Moqhaka Local Municipality on 9 July 2025. The disease has since also been detected in Metsimaholo, Maluti-a-Phofung and Mafube local municipalities. A total of 58 outbreaks have been reported to the WOAH.

One abattoir in Free State was designated by the Director: Animal Health for the controlled slaughter of FMD-positive and/or vaccinated cattle and 11 farms/feedlots were approved for controlled slaughter.

“Achieving FMD freedom with vaccination is a monumental task that requires sustained effort over many years. We are under no illusion; we have a long road ahead. This challenge is systemic, requiring fundamental change, significant financial commitment, and zero tolerance for non-compliance with animal movement laws. We are optimistic that we will turn the tide decisively. We urge every farmer, transporter and stakeholder to partner with us, adhere to the new protocols, and maintain strict biosecurity. We stand with you, and together, we will achieve FMD freedom,” Minister Steenhuisen said.

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