



agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Media briefing

Immediate release

Date: 14 January 2019

FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE OUTBREAK IN THE VHEMBE DISTRICT OF LIMPOPO

The national Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) confirmed the outbreak of Foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in cattle in the Vhembe District of Limpopo. Samples were collected during a disease investigation after reports of cattle with lameness were received. The positive location is just outside the FMD Control Zone in the Free Zone without vaccination. It is in the high surveillance area of the FMD Free Zone.

The disease was confirmed by the FMD laboratory and the matter has been reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) on Monday (7 January 2019). As a result of this development, the official OIE recognised FMD-free status of South Africa has been suspended. Consequently, any exports where FMD free zone attestation is required cannot be certified.

The impact this has had to trade in the past week has been devastating to say the least. I urge all affected industries to work with my team in minimizing the impact. This can be achieved if we all take responsibility to avoid unnecessary panic and stress, and by approaching trade partners for the necessary confirmations of trade of cloven hooved products to their territories. We have notified most of our trade partners and have started offering them assurances, especially for trade in products which do not pose a risk of transmitting the disease, such as heat treated meat and dairy products, deboned and matured beef, scoured wool, salted hides and skins, and livestock embryos.

A team of Veterinary Services experts is on the ground conducting further investigations to check the extent of the spread of the disease. Local livestock owners are urged to report any suspicion of clinical cases to the veterinary or extension officials in the area. All such cases are followed up by the veterinary officials to check for signs of the disease.

A Joint Operations Committee, consisting of SAPS, SANDF, Local Authorities, Provincial and National Veterinary officials, as well as a Veterinary Operations Committee, have been established. The VOC will have three main activities – inspections / surveillance, vaccination and movement control.

Vaccination in the 20km radius around the affected village will commence in the week starting on 14 January 2019. Culling of affected or in-contact animals in the

area is at the moment not advocated due to a number of factors, and the situation is constantly monitored by my veterinary team.

FMD is a severe, highly contagious viral disease which affects livestock with significant economic impact. The disease affects cattle, pigs (domestic and wild), sheep, goats, and other cloven hoofed animals. Signs of disease in animals may include depressed animals, sores in the mouth of animals causing reluctance to eat and lameness. Any suspected case of the disease in animals must be reported to the local State Veterinarian immediately.

The disease does not affect human beings and it is safe to consume products of cloven hoofed animals, such as meat and milk.

Farmers in the whole country are cautioned to observe bio-security measures – not to allow any new animals into their herds, and to minimize the movement of their own herds to other farms.

A disease management area was declared, being the area enclosed by the R81 Road, the R36 Road, N1 and the R524 Road. The exact boundaries of this area will be published in the government gazette. No movement of cloven hoofed animals are allowed within, into or out of this area - complete standstill. Products from cloven hoofed animals may be allowed within and out of this area, but only with a permit issued by the local state veterinarian.

The estimated number of cattle in the 20km around the affected village is 15 000. This does not mean that all 15 000 animals are infected with the disease, but there is a risk that they may become infected through contact with sick cattle. That is why they are being vaccinated to prevent further spread of the disease. All potential cases reported to the Veterinary Authorities are being investigated and, where suspicious clinical signs are found, samples are collected and sent to the laboratory for confirmation. It is better to report and follow up any suspects and either rule them out or confirm than to be afraid to report.

In addition, movement of cloven hoofed animals (including wildlife) and unprocessed products out of Mopani District and Vhembe District as well as the Molemole Municipality of Capricorn District is discouraged until further notice. Only products processed using methods validated to inactivate the FMD virus are safe to be moved out of the area.

Movement Permits which were issued for this purpose are hence forth withdrawn.

During the meeting with industry this morning, we agreed to work together to get on top of this mammoth task. We both acknowledge that no single entity can fight this without collective support and commitment. I am grateful to the Animal Health Forum for always being positive in their approach to disease control and management, and am confident that together we will beat this.

The question in the minds of most of those affected is when can the OIE free status be regained? This is a long process which is going to be very demanding on us. First we have to successfully contain the outbreak through movement control and vaccination, while at the same time investigating the extent of the outbreak, which is what we are currently doing. Then we must prove that it was a limited incident, through active surveillance outside of the vaccinated area. Considering that animals in the formerly free zone will be vaccinated, these have to be clearly marked and removed from the area once the situation calms down, if we intend including the same area in the free zone again.

Then the real hard work starts. We must review our FMD control strategy to ensure that it still complies with the OIE guidelines. Thereafter, we must implement all these measures and conduct audits to confirm that they are adhered to. All of us need to be working together to achieve this - livestock farmers, industries, veterinarians both private and state employed, National and Provincial Agriculture Departments, This starts with the first line of defense, the fences, followed by all layers which cumulatively reduce the risk of infection reaching the FMD free zone. These layers include vaccination, robust clinical inspections of animals in the protection zones and adhering to movement control requirements.

There is therefore no short-cut to this, and we have to all be committed to containing and eradicating this outbreak and thereafter regaining our FMD free zone status.

Farmers, industry and the community at large are hereby urged to observe the measures in operation so that the disease can be brought under control within as short a time as possible and the situation can return to normal.

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