

Foot and Mouth Bulletin

North Cumbria Health Services

Issue 1

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Foot and Mouth Disease in North Cumbria

The outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in North Cumbria is putting the entire community under stress. About one third of all of the cases are in Cumbria, most of them in North Cumbria. FMD is a highly contagious animal disease, caused by a aphtho virus. The outbreak in the United Kingdom is due to the highly virulent Pan-asiatic sero type O. The disease affects all clove and hoofed animals and is the most contagious of all animal diseases. In affected animals the disease starts with a fever, followed by the development of vesicles (blisters) in the mouth and on the feet. Animals excrete virus before signs appear.

FMD is technically zoonosis, a disease which is transmissible to humans. Human cases, however are extremely rare and the last case in Britain occured during the outbreak in 1967. There is very little experience of the human disease but all reported cases have had a close contact with infected animals. Symptoms are generally mild, self

limiting and mainly involving tingling blisters on the hands, fever, sore throat and blisters on the feet. Any suspected human case should be reported immediately to the Public Health Department. Person to person spread has not been reported.

Foot and Mouth disease should not be confused with a human disease known as Hand, Foot and Mouth disease. This is a totally unrelated mild infection usually occuring in children and caused by coxsackie A

Information about the local outbreak can be found on the North Cumbria Communicable Disease web-site

www.ncbugs.com

Health Services Task Force

A local health services Task Force has been established which met for the first time on 20th March. A further meeting has been arranged for 3 April at 2 pm

North Cumbria is open for business!

Although there are many restrictions on normal activities, many organisations and businesses are trying to carry on as normal. The tourist businesses are particularly badly hit and at present time they are losing about £10M a week. MAFF advises that travel to agricultural properties should be restricted to essential visits only, but there are still plenty of recreational facilities still running.

County Council Task Force

Louis Victory, the Chief Executive of the County Council is chairing a Cumbria wide Task Group which will meet regularly. The first priority will be to assist in the control of the outbreak, and on a longer term basis will plan the recovery. Peter Tiplady is representing the Health Services on this group and would be pleased to have your advice about the outbreak. He can be contacted by e-mail on: peter.tiplady@ncha.nhs.uk

Helplines

Several helplines have been especially "keyed up" to help with the outbreak.

NHS Direct (tel: 0845 4647) can help direct people to appropriate services and the **Cumbria Stress Information Network (tel: 01768 862171)** has skilled counsellors on hand providing a 24 hour telephone helpline giving information, practical help, signposting to appropriate agencies as well as offering a listening ear.

Infected Farms

When a farm is infected it will be sealed off and isolated for a period, and it will not be possible for routine visits to take place without a special licence. MAFF officials will be on hand at the farm gate who will be able to issue licences to health workers to visit the property. Staff should follow instructions given to the letter.

People who have visited an infected farm will not normally be allowed to visit an uninfected farm for a period of five full days. This will be made clear by the MAFF official before the licence is given. This further restriction on movement of professional staff can obviously cause difficulties for carrying out of normal duties, and health care staff should think very carefully about the need to visit an infected farm.

Phone ahead when visiting farms to find out whether visiting is restricted. If a visit is necessary consider making it the last visit of the day and planning work over the next few days which does not involve visiting agricultural properties.

Ambulance Visits

In emergency situations, the protection of life is of the highest priority. Ambulance staff will be given access to infected farms immediately, and people can be transported to hospital without further hindrance. Following the visit to the hospital the ambulance will be disinfected before re-entering service. Ambulance staff will send their uniforms in alginate stitched bags for laundering at a temperature of 90 °C, which will ensure sterilisation.

It should not be necessary for patients transported from infected property to be disinfected unless there is obvious and gross contamination with soil and so on.

Hospital Appointments

People living in restricted areas with hospital appointments will obviously have problems. A press release has been issued to suggest that if people have difficulty keeping an appointment they should telephone the number on their appointments slip and seek advice. Staff in the outpatients department will need to know that people on farms that are not infected and

have no restrictions placed on human movement can come to hospital outpatients. If the appointment is urgent, patients can be brought to hospital by ambulance. Some appointments will simply have to be put off for the time being and arrangements made to send another appointment at a

Is Smoke from Burning Carcasses a Hazard?

Smoke from any source can trigger asthma attacks in people who already have a problem. If the area around the home or workplace becomes smoky as a result of burning of dead animals, we would advise people with breathing problems to close their windows and remain indoors if possible.

People with asthma or breathing difficulties should make sure that they have a good supply of inhalers. Parents of children who suffer from asthma should ensure their children have an inhaler to take to school with them, or any other school groups that they go to, such as Brownies or Cubs.

The Public Health Department is not aware of any special hazards posed

Primary Care

GPs and their teams will be providing a service as near as normal as possible during the outbreak. Once a worker has entered an infected farm there may be restrictions on their further movements and they may be told that they should not visit uninfected agricultural premises for five full days. CueDoc and Primary Care Groups are working together with the Health Authority to find ways of ensuring that essential visits can still go ahead.

Disposable Suits and Shoes

A supply of disposable shoes and over shoes is available at CueDoc and at the Health Authority offices in Carlisle. CueDoc will supply these to doctors on call when required. Other staff who need a disposable suit and shoes should contact the Department of Public Health by telephone.

