



## Implications for farmers that volunteer to vaccinate their clinically healthy dairy herds for Foot and Mouth Disease

8 July 2024

To avoid the spread and devastating consequences of **Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)**, dairy farmers in the FMD area of the Eastern Cape have requested that their farms be vaccinated against FMD as a precautionary measure. It is important that dairy farmers and the processors collecting their milk, are aware of the consequences of having their healthy herds vaccinated against FMD, prior to requesting vaccination. This document has been compiled by Milk SA to provide clarity on how a farm that is FMD negative will be affected if the herd is vaccinated against FMD, under current regulations.

1. Farms within the 10km controlled zone surrounding a FMD positive farm can apply to have their FMD-free herd vaccinated against FMD.
2. The state will not force any FMD-free herd to be vaccinated. Farmers have to request to have their herd vaccinated against FMD by completing the application form and signing the official indemnity form, available from the local state veterinarian.
3. Only farms within the 10km controlled zone are permitted to apply. No farms outside the 10km controlled zone will be considered. Farms bordering FMD-positive farms will enjoy priority.
4. Under the current regulations, a farm that is vaccinated against FMD will be regarded as FMD-positive. This will have the following consequences:
  - a. The farm is effectively placed under quarantine.
  - b. Cloven-hoofed animals may not be moved onto or off the farm without written permission from the state veterinarian while under quarantine – which will last 12 months or more.
  - c. Day Zero will be set as the date that the last animal was vaccinated on the farm, for the first time, in the case of clinically healthy farms. Should any lesions or suspect cases be found, day Zero will be determined by the state veterinarian as the date there were no more indications of circulating virus. (This entails 2 negative herd inspections at a 14-day interval).
  - d. Under ideal conditions, the herds will be given a booster vaccination 4 to 6 months after the first vaccination in animals intended to live – Stud, Dairy etc. Slaughter animals will only receive one vaccination as in feedlots.
  - e. Day Zero (for clinically healthy herds that volunteered for vaccination) remains the day the last animal on the farm received vaccination for the first time.
  - f. For the first 6 months from Day Zero cloven-hoofed animals may only be moved off the farm for slaughter at a FMD approved abattoir, under a red-cross permit from the state vet.
  - g. After 6 months from day zero animals may be slaughtered at any abattoir – Still under a red-cross permit from the state veterinarian (these farms are still under quarantine).
  - h. Until the farm is declared FMD free, cloven-hoofed animals may only be moved off the farm under a red-cross permit for slaughter purposes. Animals may not be sold or moved for any other reason, unless permission is given by the state veterinarian (which will only be considered under exceptional conditions) – and even then, only between farms of the same FMD status.

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- i. Provided there are no cases of FMD on the farm the farm will only be considered FMD free after 12 months from Day Zero, at the earliest. The process to declare a farm FMD free may take even longer.
  - j. To prove that a farm is FMD free the herd needs to be bled and the blood tested for FMD antibodies. Although it is possible to distinguish the vaccine antibodies from the antibodies produced by an animal that was infected with FMD, the tests can give false positive results in some cases. This makes it difficult to interpret positive results from a healthy herd that was vaccinated voluntarily against FMD. This is why farms will be considered FMD positive for at least 12 months from Day Zero.
  - k. Calves born from FMD vaccinated cows/heifers will acquire FMD antibodies via the colostrum and will therefore also test positive for FMD on serological blood tests, until these maternal antibodies have disappeared from their systems.
  - l. To prove that a FMD vaccinated farm is free from FMD infection, calves born 2 months or more after day zero (environmental virus to be considered), will be blood tested after 9 months from Day Zero. The assumption is that the FMD antibodies acquired via the colostrum will have disappeared by then and only calves exposed to the FMD virus will test positive. This should prove whether a vaccinated farm is actually free from FMD.
5. While a vaccinated farm is classified as FMD positive, the milk will also be considered FMD positive and needs to be handled as such with the same implications on Export.
- i. All milk from FMD positive farms needs to be double pasteurized or UHT treated.
  - ii. Trucks collecting milk from these farms need to adhere to very strict biosecurity principles.
  - iii. Milk processors collecting milk from clinically healthy vaccinated farms will lose their export status if they collect milk from these farms. Unless the processing plant can prove to the state that they can keep the contaminated and clean milk lines completely separate.
6. The state veterinarian has started to vaccinate FMD free farms. Applications from farmers to have their FMD free herds vaccinated are being processed as fast as they can. To avoid delays in getting the applications processed farmers must ensure that they complete the applications in detail and supply all the information required when submitting an application. Any farms with parts struck out in the indemnity will not be considered!
7. Please take into account that these are abnormal times and therefore we cannot have business as usual. South Africa has not experienced an outbreak of FMD in a dairy producing area to this extent before. As a result, the impact of FMD in a dairy area is only apparent now. Until fairly recently, even FMD infected farms were not vaccinated. The state veterinary services had to adjust the regulations and standards to allow FMD free farms to be vaccinated as a precautionary measure. This is a massive step in the right direction and the state veterinarians have to be commended for allowing this. The consequences of allowing this will only become apparent over time. There are improvements to the system that can be made and we are working closely with the authorities to make adjustments with caution.
8. The next step would be to get a system in place whereby a FMD free herd that was vaccinated, can be declared FMD free after vaccination and that the milk from these animals is not subject to being classified as FMD positive.
9. It goes without saying that biosecurity has to be maintained at a very strict level. Biosecurity is only as good as the weakest link. NB! - We cannot have a false sense of security from vaccination. Separate farms belonging to the same owner need to be managed separately with no movement of staff or vehicles between farms. Vaccinated farms can still become infected and have virus circulate and infect the environment. Vaccine immunity only lasts approximately 4-6 months and virus can then re-circulate on the farm. Every farmer, whether vaccinated or not, still has a responsibility to take all possible measures to protect neighbouring farmers and areas!

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