WATER UK BRIEFING NOTE

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE AND DRINKING WATER

SUMMARY

- **UK water suppliers place the highest priority on assuring the quality of water provided to their customers.**
- **Foot and Mouth disease (FMD) is caused by a virus that only affects certain types of animals, primarily those with cloven hooves.**
- **FMD is not recognised as a disease that affects humans and water is not considered a vector in transmission of the disease**
- **Normal drinking water treatment is effective at removing viruses and will remove the virus that causes foot and mouth disease**
- **It is not necessary to set specific standards for the organism in drinking water**

TECHNICAL BACKGROUND

What causes Foot and Mouth disease?

Foot and Mouth disease (FMD) is a disease of animals caused by a virus that behaves in a similar way to other enteric viruses. In cloven-hoofed animals it is highly infectious causing a fever and followed by the development of vesicles or blisters chiefly in the mouth or on the feet. It affects cattle, sheep, pigs and goats but also wild cloven hoofed animals. Hedgehogs and rats are also susceptible.

Animals pick up the disease either by direct or indirect contact with an infected animal or contaminated foodstuff. Indirect contact includes airborne spread (suspected of spread over considerable distances) or any other contamination by an infected animal or by eating or coming into contact with an infected carcass or fluids from an infected animal. Cattle trucks, market places and loading ramps are sources of infection.

FMD is not recognised as a human infection, with only extremely rare recorded cases of mild symptoms following extensive close contact with an infected animal. There are therefore no implications for the human food chain or drinking water.

Are standards necessary for drinking water?

The sources of infectious material are fluids from blisters, saliva, milk, dung and the blood of infected animals. The likelihood of significant amounts of such material reaching water sources remains remote.

> **Normal drinking water treatment is effective at removing viruses and will remove the virus that causes foot and mouth disease**

Drinking water is not considered a vector in transmission of the disease and therefore it is not necessary to set any standards.

How is the quality of drinking water assured?

Given the dilution factors, treatment barriers and the non-susceptibility of humans, the transmission of this disease via drinking water is not regarded as a hazard for humans or animals.

However if an outbreak of Foot and mouth disease occurred, water companies would be vigilant to the risks of spreading this highly infectious disease during the course of their operational activities. They would also work with the relevant authorities in minimising movements and observing strict disinfection protocols within affected areas. The treatment of bio-solids and the process of sewage treatment itself are effective in the removal and destruction of viruses.