

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the lessons to be learned, our first and central recommendation is as follows:

We recommend that the Government, led by DEFRA, should develop a national strategy for animal health and disease control positioned within the framework set out in the report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food. This strategy should be developed in consultation and partnership with the farming industry and with representatives of the wider rural economy. The European Commission, the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, local authorities and other agencies of government should be involved in this process.

Throughout the report, we draw out a further 80 recommendations as they emerge from our analysis in support of this over-arching recommendation. This section pulls together those recommendations grouped thematically. Each recommendation is numbered and has a page reference. They fall into three broad areas:

Developing and maintaining a national strategy for disease avoidance and control.

- Strategy
- Legislation
- Vaccination
- Farming practices
- Veterinary matters
- Biosecurity
- Training
- Import controls

Developing and maintaining appropriate contingency plans and ensuring effective preparedness.

- Contingency planning
- Scientific advice
- Information
- Public health

- Slaughter and disposal
- Animal welfare
- Human resources

Managing an outbreak of disease.

- Crisis management
- Speed of response
- Diagnosis
- Role of the military
- Communications
- Management controls

Developing and maintaining a national strategy for disease avoidance and control.

Strategy

The following recommendations offer specific proposals in support of our central recommendation on strategy:

Accepted best practice in risk analysis should be used by DEFRA and others in developing livestock health and disease control strategies.
(9, p.38)

Cost-benefit analyses of FMD control strategies should be updated and maintained. These should be undertaken at both the UK and EU level.
(52, p.139)

Where the control of exotic animal diseases has wider economic or other implications, the Government should ensure that those consequences for the country as a whole are fully considered.
(32, p.86)

The interests of all sectors likely to bear the brunt of any costs should be properly represented and taken into account when designing policy options to control animal disease outbreaks.
(51, p.139)

Disease control policies should be developed in consultation with those local authorities responsible for implementing them.
(63, p.153)

Lessons learned should routinely be reviewed in the light of changing circumstances. Policies, plans and preparations should be adapted accordingly.
(2, p.25)

The Government should make explicit the extent to which the wider effects of disease control strategies have been identified, measured and taken into account in policy decisions.
(50, p.137)

The Government should publish a biennial report to the nation on the level of preparedness to tackle animal disease emergencies. The first report should be published in 2003 and include measures of achievement against goals.
(11, p.39)

The resources and research programmes of the Pirbright Laboratory should be fully integrated into the national strategy for animal disease control and budget provisions made accordingly.
(65, p.159)

In developing the surveillance strategy, there should be the widest possible involvement of those with a role to play in surveillance.
(67, p.160)

Legislation

The animal health legislative framework should be robust, unambiguous and fit for purpose. This was not the case during the 2001 epidemic.

The powers available in the Animal Health Act 1981 should be re-examined, possibly in the context of a wider review of animal health legislation, to remove any ambiguity over the legal basis for future disease control strategies.
(77, p.163)

Provision should be made for the possible application of pre-emptive culling policies, if justified by well-informed veterinary and scientific advice, and judged to be appropriate to the circumstances.
(38, p.99)

Vaccination

The country's options for disease control should be decided in advance of any future outbreak of infectious animal disease.

Our Inquiry has not explored in detail the scientific issues concerning FMD vaccination, which were a central part of the remit of the scientific inquiry conducted by the Royal Society. We have, however, formed a view that the option of vaccination should be a part of any future strategy for the control of FMD. There are hurdles to be overcome: the science is not yet clear enough; many farmers and farming organisations have expressed their opposition; there are concerns about consumer reaction; there are complex EU and international issues. All these must be tackled urgently. The UK Government should take the lead in the international debate. We are not arguing for routine preventative vaccination to be adopted but, in the event of an outbreak, emergency protective vaccination must be an option available for use whenever judged by the veterinary experts to be appropriate. All necessary work to prepare for such a possibility should be put in hand. This means that:

The Government should ensure that the option of vaccination forms part of any future strategy for the control of FMD.
(48, p.129)

The Government should establish a consensus on vaccination options for disease control in advance of an outbreak.
(47, p.129)

The State Veterinary Service should maintain the capability to vaccinate in the event of a future epidemic if the conditions are right.
(49, p.129)

Farming practices

The livestock farming industry and government should examine the opportunities to reduce the risk of disease by influencing farming practices. Throughout our report we have identified a number of specific proposals for government that will contribute to this:

The Government should retain the 20-day movement restrictions pending a detailed risk assessment and wide ranging cost-benefit analysis.
(78, p.164)

The Government should develop a comprehensive livestock tracing system using electronic tags to cover cattle, sheep and pigs, taking account of developments at EU level. The Government should seek to lead the debate in Europe on this issue.

(79, p.164)

The UK prohibition of swill feeding of catering waste containing meat products should continue. The UK should continue to support a ban at EU level.

(15, p.49)

The Government should build an up-to-date database of livestock, farming and marketing practices. This should include research to examine the evolution of regional livestock stocking densities and implications for disease risk and control.

(5, p.30)

However, the Government can only do so much to prevent a recurrence of disease. The farming industry itself has a crucial role to play. We endorse the recommendations of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food on assurance schemes and recommend further that:

The livestock industry should work with Government to undertake a thorough review of the assurance and licensing options to identify those arrangements most likely to reward good practice and take-up of training, and how such a new system might be implemented.

(76, p.162)

Farm assurance schemes should take account of animal health and welfare, biosecurity, food safety and environmental issues.

(75, p.162)

We also urge the livestock industry, and its representative organisations, to do everything in their power to promote good practice, to tackle shortcomings and poor standards of farming, and to work within the framework of recommendations we have set out to reduce the risk posed by infectious animal diseases.

Veterinary matters

The State Veterinary Service provides the backbone for a national livestock health and disease control strategy. Maintaining a strong State Veterinary Service, at the centre of a surveillance and disease control strategy, and involving many veterinary and other agencies, should be a high priority.

Notwithstanding some of the proposals made to us, we do not support the devolution of State Veterinary Service responsibilities to Scotland. There are advantages in retaining an integrated organisation for Great Britain, not least in terms of national disease control strategies. However, we recommend the following:

As many functions of the State Veterinary Service as possible should be relocated from London to regional centres, particularly to Scotland and Wales.

(70, p.161)

There should be a reappraisal of Local Veterinary Inspectors' roles and conditions.

(3, p.28)

The Government should develop opportunities for increased use of veterinary 'paramedics'.

(69, p.160)

Biosecurity

Biosecurity measures must be a part of generally recognised good practice for everyone involved in producing and handling livestock. In the event of a serious disease outbreak good biosecurity becomes critical and should be enforceable.

Farmers, vets and others involved in the livestock industry should have access to training in biosecurity measures. Such training should form an integral part of courses at agricultural colleges.

(60, p.148)

The livestock industry and government jointly should develop codes of good practice on biosecurity. They should explore ways to communicate effectively with all practitioners and how incentives might be used to raise standards.

(61, p.150)

Training

During our Inquiry, gaps in people's knowledge and understanding of the factors involved in preventing and managing infectious diseases of livestock were brought to our attention. Filling these gaps is a long-term challenge for the industry, the veterinary profession as well as training centres, colleges and universities.

The Government should support a national action group charged with the responsibility of producing a plan to tackle the gaps in practitioners' knowledge of preventing and managing infectious diseases of livestock. To be effective this will need a timetable, milestones for achievement and incentives.

(71, p.161)

Colleges, universities and training organisations should provide courses to equip those working in the food and livestock industries, and those owning susceptible animals, with the skills and knowledge to enable them to recognise the signs of animal disease early and take appropriate action to prevent its spread.

(72, p.161)

Training for Local Veterinary Inspectors in exotic diseases should be intensified, and consolidated into ongoing training strategies.

(74, p.162)

DEFRA should commission a handbook for farmers on identifying and responding to animal disease, drawing on the experience of 2001.

(73, p.162)

Training for those responsible for managing disease control should include the relevant legal frameworks and the structure and responsibilities of local government.

(43, p.112)

DEFRA and the Department for Education and Skills jointly should explore with the veterinary professional bodies and higher education institutions the scope for increasing the capacity of undergraduate and postgraduate veterinary provision. Equivalent work should be done in Scotland and Wales.

(68, p.160)

Imports

The national strategy for livestock disease control must ensure that proper steps are taken to minimise the risk of incursion from illegal imports of meat and meat products. We recommend that:

DEFRA should be given responsibility for co-ordinating all the activities of Government to step up efforts to keep illegal meat imports out of the country. This should include better regulations and improved surveillance on illegal imports of meat and meat products.

(14, p.48)

The Government should ensure that best practice from import regimes elsewhere be incorporated with domestic practices where appropriate.

(12, p.47)

The European Commission should lead a targeted risk based approach designed to keep FMD out of EU Member States. The UK should work alongside other EU Member States to highlight areas of greatest risk.

(13, p.47)

The UK should urge the OIE to consider the implications, for the detection and control of FMD, of the removal of swine vesicular disease from the List A of notifiable diseases.

(64, p.156)

Developing and maintaining appropriate contingency plans and ensuring effective preparedness.

Contingency planning

DEFRA should develop further its interim plan, published in March 2002, in full consultation with all interested parties. Its relevance should be maintained through agreed programmes of rehearsal, practice, review and reporting.

This work should be given priority for funding.

(81, p.165)

The following recommendations offer specific proposals in support:

As part of its contingency planning, DEFRA, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales, working with the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, should examine the practicality of establishing a national volunteer reserve trained and informed to respond immediately to an outbreak of infectious animal disease.

(30, p.82)

Contingency plans should set out procedures to be followed in the event that an emergency expands beyond worst-case expectations.

(6, p.36)

Government departments should ensure that their own internal departmental arrangements properly resource contingency planning work. This should be monitored by the National Audit Office.

(10, p.39)

The contingency plans of DEFRA, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales should specify the measures needed during an epidemic to monitor progress and report to key stakeholders.

(22, p.73)

The State Veterinary Service, together with the Pirbright Laboratory, should increase their horizon scanning and threat assessment capabilities for major infectious animal diseases.

(66, p.160)

The Government should build into contingency plans the capacity and processes to scale up communications systems and resources rapidly at the onset of any future outbreak of animal disease.

(53, p.142)

Where regional boundaries of Government Offices do not match those of local authorities or other agencies of government, special provision should be made in contingency planning for management and communications during a crisis.

(4, p.28)

The Restricted Infected Area ('Blue Box' Biosecurity arrangements) procedures should be built into contingency plans.

(62, p.151)

The National Assembly for Wales and DEFRA should develop a comprehensive agreement for co-ordinating the management of outbreaks of infectious animal diseases in Wales. This should cover all aspects of a disease outbreak, delegating responsibility locally, where appropriate, and providing clear lines of communication and accountability.

(31, p.84)

Scientific advice

The involvement of independent sources of scientific advice early in the 2001 epidemic was due to the personal intervention of the Chairman of the Food Standards Agency. The formal engagement of a scientific advisory group was not until 35 days after the start of the epidemic. In order to ensure the fullest access to best scientific and veterinary advice, we recommend that:

DEFRA's Chief Scientist should maintain a properly constituted standing committee ready to advise in an emergency on scientific aspects of disease control. The role of this group should include advising on horizon scanning and emerging risks. Particular attention should be given to the recommendations on the use of scientific advisory committees in The BSE Inquiry report of 2000.

(34, p.91)

Public health

FMD itself poses no risk to public health, but activities involved in managing an epidemic may create issues of public health concern. This was the case during the outbreak of 2001. We recommend that:

All agencies with responsibility for public health should be actively involved in designing disease control strategies and in contingency planning and communications.

(44, p.112)

Information

Without access to timely, high quality information decision-makers are handicapped. The FMD crisis revealed shortcomings in the information gathering and processing infrastructure. We recommend that:

DEFRA should lay out milestones for investment and achievement for improved management information systems.

(20, p.73)

Data capture and management information systems should be kept up to date and reflect best practice.

(21, p.73)

Standard definitions of all important parameters of information should be agreed in advance.

(23, p.73)

DEFRA's Geographical Information System and the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) should be designed so that they can be used more effectively for disease control purposes.

(19, p.72)

Use should be made of alternative sources of information and intelligence during crises.

(18, p.71)

Slaughter and disposal

Mass pyres and huge burial sites, used to dispose of the remains of millions of slaughtered animals, remain vivid images of the 2001 epidemic. We recommend that:

Burning animals on mass pyres should not be used again as a strategy for disposal.

(42, p.108)

DEFRA should revise its guidance and instructions for slaughter.

(28, p.78)

Local communities should be consulted on mass disposal according to best practice guidelines, and the question of compensation for communities accommodating emergency disposal sites be researched. We recognise that this is a complex legal area nationally and at EU level.

(45, p.114)

Animal welfare

One lesson from the experience of 2001 was that animal welfare cases rise rapidly during the course of an expanding epidemic. This may be the case in any major outbreak. We recommend therefore that:

The Government should consider the welfare implications of disease control policies, as part of contingency planning for FMD and other diseases, and should seek to identify strategies that minimise the need for slaughter and disposal on welfare grounds.

(46, p.119)

The joint DEFRA Industry Working Group for Animal Disease Insurance should ensure that its scope and membership is set widely enough to address valuation and compensation issues highlighted by the 2001 outbreak. Clear deadlines should be set for reporting progress.

(80, p.165)

Human resources

One of the biggest challenges in crisis management is to ensure that the right people with the right resources are in the right places at the right time. A strategy for personnel management during a crisis should be worked out in advance and kept up-to-date in collaboration with stakeholders. We recommend that:

DEFRA should develop its human resources plans for use in emergency. In particular they should focus on how staff numbers and expertise can be rapidly increased at a time of crisis. This should be developed in England in consultation with the Cabinet Office, the Regional Co-ordination Unit and the network of Government Offices. Similar arrangements should be developed in Scotland and Wales.

(8, p.36)

Contingency plans at regional level should include mechanisms for making effective use of local voluntary resources.

(24, p.74)

Contingency plans should provide for early appointment of Regional Operations Directors or their equivalent to take on operational management of a crisis. There should be a cadre of senior managers – not all of whom need come from central government – who can fulfil the role of the Regional Operations Director in an emergency and who should be trained in advance.

(33, p.87)

Managing an outbreak of disease

Crisis management

With the benefit of hindsight, there were insufficiently sensitive triggers in place to set off crisis warnings early enough.

There should be a mechanism, put in place at the centre of government, to assess potential domestic civil threats and emergencies and provide advice to the Prime Minister on when to trigger the wider response of Government.

(39, p.102)

The practice of crisis management was supported by the creation of the Joint Co-ordination Centre in Page Street. This influential group of senior officials, vets and military officers was joined by a representative of the National Farmers' Union and shared in the decision making and subsequent communication processes. This added value and we support this approach for the future. We recommend that:

A representative of the wider rural economy should be invited to participate in the Joint Co-ordination Centre.

(40, p.106)

At the height of the crisis the overall direction of policy and operations benefited from the direct involvement of the Prime Minister as well as senior ministers and officials. This meant that there was no senior group within government offering informed, but detached, advice that could challenge prevailing thinking. We recommend therefore that:

The concept of a 'senatorial group' should be developed to provide independent advice to the Prime Minister and Cabinet during national crises.

(41, p.107)

Steps should always be taken to explain the rationale of policies on the ground, particularly where implementation is likely to be controversial. Wherever possible, local circumstances should be taken into account without undermining the overall strategy.

(37, p.98)

Speed of initial response

In an emergency, such as an outbreak of FMD, it is important to react with speed and certainty, taking decisions and mobilising the required resources as soon as possible. A few hours gained or lost at the early stages can make a big difference. Preparation for rapid response is an important element of contingency planning. We recommend therefore that:

Provision should be made in contingency plans for rapid prioritisation of a department's work in the face of a crisis, and for speedy reassignment of resources.

(7, p.36)

In all suspected cases of FMD, the response should reflect the experience of the emergency services, where speed and urgency of action govern decision making.

(16, p.61)

The State Veterinary Service should consider forming a national network of 'flying squad' teams capable of responding to an alert. The continuing occurrence of false alarms can then be used constructively to maintain readiness and to practice routines.

(17, p.61)

Diagnosis

All the evidence we have received supports the need for more reliable and speedy diagnosis of disease. Modern diagnostic technology should be harnessed to contribute to the goal of acting with speed and certainty. We recommend that:

The State Veterinary Service should be routinely equipped with the most up-to-date diagnostic tools for use in clinical practice, to contribute to speed and certainty of action at critical times.

(36, p.95)

Role of the military

The contribution of the armed forces during the FMD crisis received much praise. The military can bring professional expertise and advice in managing an emergency. In particular, they have valuable logistical and operational management skills. However, since no two crises will be the same and, since the armed forces have their own priorities, it would not be possible or wise to make specific recommendations for the future based on their assumed availability. We do, however, recommend that:

As part of the mechanisms to trigger the wider Government response, the military should be consulted at the earliest appropriate opportunity to provide advice and consider the nature of possible support.

(29, p.82)

Communications

To have any chance of communicating successfully to all stakeholders it is essential to plan in advance.

A government-wide crisis communication strategy should be developed by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat with specific plans being prepared at departmental level; for example by DEFRA and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales in the context of animal disease control.

(54, p.142)

The Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales handle communications separately. The following are recommendations to DEFRA. In Scotland and Wales we urge that systems should be reviewed as necessary to ensure equivalent standards are met.

We recommend that:

DEFRA should develop its regional communication strategy and ensure that it has effective systems for disseminating clear and concise information quickly to all its regional offices. This should be developed in the context of cross-government crisis management planning, in consultation with the Regional Co-ordination Unit and Government Offices.

(55, p.143)

DEFRA should resource its website to ensure it is a state-of-the-art operation. In any future outbreak, the website should be used extensively and a central priority should be to ensure that it contains timely and up-to-date information at national and local level.

(56, p.144)

DEFRA should commission research into the effectiveness of its direct communications during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak of 2001 so that all the lessons may be learned, acted upon and the results published.

(57, p.144)

The State Veterinary Service should revise all its disease control forms A-E and information about exotic animal diseases in liaison with the Plain English Campaign.

(58, p.145)

Communications strategies during a crisis should take special account of the needs of the international media.

(59, p.147)

Management controls

At the height of a crisis, the pressure to get things done may mean that proper management controls are overlooked. The National Audit Office examined this issue in its report of the FMD outbreak of 2001. We have a number of recommendations to add, from the perspective, of our own Inquiry, namely:

Dedicated control systems should be ready for use in a sustained emergency, and regularly tested as part of the contingency planning process.

(25, p.74)

The processes for procuring and delivering the necessary goods and services from external sources during a crisis should be reviewed. Systems should be tested to ensure they can cope with unexpected increased demands.

(26, p.74)

Priority should be given to recruiting accounting and procurement professionals to operate in emergency control centres during a crisis.

(27, p.74)

From day one of an outbreak, provision should be made to keep a record of all decisions made and any actions to be taken.

(35, p.93)