



Just the Facts...

Food Safety - Mad Cow Disease

The following information will help you to become familiar with food safety issues pertaining to “Mad Cow Disease” or Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE).

*There has been a lot of news about BSE infected beef in Europe. This fact sheet is designed to give you some basic information about BSE and how you can protect yourself and your family. It is important to know that **the US has banned the import of European beef and US military dining facilities, commissaries, exchange facilities (BX/PX/NEX) and MWR worldwide have been directed to sell only beef and beef products purchased from US approved sources. No European beef is to be used in these facilities.***

WHAT IS BSE or “Mad Cow Disease”?

BSE, also called Mad Cow Disease, causes spongy degeneration of the brain in cows and is fatal within weeks to months from onset of symptoms. BSE is one of a group of diseases called Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE), which infects several different species of animals including sheep, deer, mink and humans.

BSE was first diagnosed in cattle in the United Kingdom in 1986. Since that time, the disease has been found throughout Europe, in Asia, and it is considered a risk in the following countries: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the Republic of Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia, Monaco, the Netherlands, Norway, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, The Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. There have been no cases of BSE found in the US.

WHY IS BSE IMPORTANT?

In 1996, a new form of the human disease called variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (vCJD) was diagnosed in a group of people in the UK and later in France and Ireland. The time from infection to onset of disease is uncertain, but can be anywhere from 10 to 20 or more years. Scientific researchers believe that eating meat from cattle infected with BSE is the cause of vCJD.

WHAT IS MY RISK OF EXPOSURE TO BSE?

Public health control measures have been recommended by the World Health Organization to prevent BSE-infected meat from entering the human food chain. BSE has not been found in the United States, thus meat from US sources is considered free of BSE. The US has banned the import of European beef and US military dining facilities, commissaries, exchange facilities (BX/PX/NEX) and MWR activities worldwide have been directed to sell only beef and beef products purchased from US approved sources. No European beef is to be used in these facilities.

Milk, dairy products, poultry and pork are not believed to pose any risk for transmitting the BSE agent.

If you live outside the United States, you need to be aware that local restaurants may be serving European beef products, even in countries outside Europe. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the current risk of getting vCJD from eating beef (muscle meat) and beef products produced from cattle in Europe is extremely small (fewer than 1 case per 10 billion servings). Although the risk is small, it is important for you to know what you can do to avoid the risk.

Things you can do:

- 1) Avoid beef and beef products from off installation markets.
- 2) Select solid pieces of beef muscle meat, such as steaks or roasts, instead of beef products such as burgers and sausages.

For more information please refer to:

1. U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine Website. chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/madcowdisease/
2. Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy. USDA, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, APHIS Website. www.aphis.usda.gov
3. Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy. USDA Food Safety Inspection Service Website. www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/topics/bse.htm
4. Emerging and Other Communicable Diseases (EMC) World Health Organization Consultation Report, March 1997.
5. WHO Fact Sheet #180 and #11. WHO Website. www.who.int
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Infectious Diseases, Travelers Health Website. www.cdc.gov/travel/madcow

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