FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE CHRONOGICAL DEVELOPMENT FROM 1900 TO 2026

Early 1900s (1900–1919): Introduction and Early Spread

FMD was **introduced into South Africa around the turn of the century**, mainly through:

- Military and trade movements linked to the **Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902)**

The disease spread rapidly among cattle, sheep, and pigs.

At the time, **no effective vaccines or coordinated national controls** existed.

Severe losses occurred in commercial and subsistence farming, disrupting food supply and draft power.

Impact:
High economic and productivity losses; early recognition that FMD posed a national and regional threat

1920s–1930s: Recognition and Early Control

Government veterinary services expanded significantly.

FMD was increasingly linked to **wildlife reservoirs**, especially **African buffalo**.

Early movement controls and **quarantine measures** were introduced.

First attempts at **regional zoning** and disease reporting began.

Impact:
Improved understanding of transmission, but outbreaks remained frequent.

1940s–1950s: Institutional Control and Vaccination

The role of **buffalo in Kruger National Park** as a permanent FMD reservoir became scientifically established.

South Africa began:

- **Systematic vaccination campaigns**
- Strengthening veterinary surveillance

Construction of **game-proof fencing** started to limit contact between wildlife and cattle.

Impact:
Marked reduction in outbreaks in commercial farming areas, but endemic risk remained in the northeast.

1960s: Zoning and Separation Strategy

Formal **FMD control zones** were established:

- Infected (endemic) zones near Kruger Park
- Buffer and surveillance zones
- FMD-free zones in the rest of the country

Movement of livestock became tightly regulated.

Vaccination was compulsory in high-risk areas.

- **Impact:**
  South Africa achieved **relative national control**, allowing agricultural growth and export ambitions.

1970s: Export Growth Under Tight Control

FMD was largely **confined to controlled zones**.

South Africa expanded **beef exports**, especially to Europe.

Veterinary controls became internationally respected.

Impact:

FMD shifted from a constant crisis to a **managed risk**, though costly to maintain.

Early 1980s (1981–1984): Major Setback

A **significant FMD outbreak** occurred outside the endemic zone.

Resulted in:

- Immediate **international export bans**
- Large-scale culling and emergency vaccination

Highlighted the vulnerability of the system to breaches.

Impact:
Severe economic losses and loss of trade credibility.

Late 1980s: Recovery and System Strengthening

Control systems were tightened:

- Better fencing
- Stricter movement permits
- Improved diagnostics

South Africa regained **limited export access**, though under scrutiny.

Impact:
Renewed emphasis on biosecurity and zoning integrity.

1990s: International Recognition and Disease-Free Status

South Africa aligned with **WOAH (World Organisation for Animal Health)** standards.

By the mid-to-late 1990s:

- Large parts of the country were officially recognized as **FMD-free without vaccination**
- Endemic zones remained under vaccination and strict control

Beef exports resumed to premium markets.

Impact:
FMD became a **localized, managed disease**, rather than a national constraint.

Overall 20th-Century Impact Summary

Early century: Devastating, poorly controlled disease

Mid-century: Scientific understanding and institutional control

Late century: Zoning, vaccination, and international compliance

By 1999, South Africa had transformed FMD from a widespread threat into a **strategically managed endemic disease**, balancing livestock production, wildlife conservation, and exports.

2000: Loss of FMD-free status

In **September 2000**, South Africa lost its **FMD-free zone status** (previously held since 1995) after two outbreaks:

- A **Pan-Asian type O FMD** case was confirmed in a piggery near Pietermaritzburg (KwaZulu-Natal).
- Shortly afterward, a **SAT1 outbreak** occurred in a feedlot in Mpumalanga.

Both outbreaks occurred inside areas previously recognised as FMD-free, due to illegal swill feeding and fence breaches, showing how quickly FMD could re-enter controlled zones.

Impact:
FMD status was downgraded, forcing stricter containment efforts and disrupting export certification based on “FMD-free without vaccination.”

2001–2010: Post-2000 control

FMD control focused on:

- Re-establishing **zoning and buffer systems**
- Ongoing surveillance
- Maintaining wildlife controls (e.g., fencing and separation from buffalo reservoirs)

No major new free-zone breaches on the scale of 2000 were reported in this decade — reflecting continuous vigilance and improved veterinary systems.

2011–2019: Sporadic outbreaks and trade implications

2019 (January): A **new FMD outbreak in Limpopo's Vhembe District** (outside the endemic zone) was confirmed; this led to the **suspension of South Africa's FMD-free export status** for some livestock products.

Impact:
Exports requiring FMD-free attestations were affected, highlighting trade vulnerability to even single outbreaks.

2020–2021: Continued risk and system readiness

The country maintained strong surveillance, and veterinary services continued to monitor cattle movements and wildlife (buffalo) contact zones.

SADC trade and regional animal health partnerships helped coordinate FMD vigilance.

2021 Onward: Major FMD outbreak events

2021–2023: KwaZulu-Natal initiation

An **ongoing FMD outbreak began in May 2021** in KwaZulu-Natal, driven by the **SAT2 serotype**.

A **Disease Management Area (DMA)** was officially declared to restrict animal movements and contain the disease.t

Impact:
This represented one of the most persistent multi-year outbreaks in recent South African history.

2024: Spread to other provinces

Eastern Cape: A significant outbreak beginning in May 2024 affected dozens of farms near Humansdorp and East London, leading to widespread vaccination efforts.

Control measures included:

Quarantine zones

Extensive vaccination of cattle and sheep

Restrictions on livestock movements

Impact:
FMD presence extended beyond the endemic northeast, affecting commercial and smallholder farms.

2025: Large multi-province outbreak

A broad outbreak situation across many regions became clear in 2025:

Outbreak reporting (early–mid 2025)

KwaZulu-Natal continued to report high numbers of active outbreaks, especially in communal and commercial herds. Displaying both **SAT2 and SAT1 serotypes** in different areas.

The disease **spread into Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Free State, and North West provinces**, linked epidemiologically to the KZN SAT2 event.

By **July 2025**, at least **270 FMD outbreaks** were reported across five provinces, many still unresolved.

Control measures deployed:

- Quarantines and DMAs extended to contain spread
- Vaccination campaigns intensified
- Controlled slaughter (depopulation) in some regions to break transmission cycles

Trade and economic impact (2025):

Some international markets (e.g., China, Namibia, Zimbabwe) imposed **bans on South African beef exports** due to outbreak concerns.

Late 2025: Mixed resolution and persistent hot spots

By **October 2025**:

- **Western Cape and Northern Cape** maintained FMD-free status with surveillance.

- **KwaZulu-Natal (SAT2), Mpumalanga, Free State, Eastern Cape, North west province, Gauteng, Limpopo** continued experiencing active outbreaks, with multiple hotspots under control or monitoring.

Impact:

- Outbreak management continued with varying success, reflecting both disease persistence and effectiveness of control when quickly applied.

2026 (current ongoing situation)

- Outbreaks are **still active in multiple provinces**, including **KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, Mpumalanga, North West, Gauteng, Limpopo, Eastern Cape, and possibly NORTHERN CAPE TOO.** Control efforts continue with quarantines, vaccinations, animal movement restrictions, and active surveillance.