

South Africa initiates vaccination drive to build herd immunity against Foot and mouth disease (FMD) across the nation

09 March 2026 | News

Measures includes maintaining the cold chain, managing secure storage facilities, handling inventory management and coordinating distribution to vaccination teams operating across multiple provinces



Measures includes maintaining the cold chain, managing secure storage facilities, handling inventory management and coordinating distribution to vaccination teams operating across multiple provinces

The South African government has initiated a nationwide vaccination campaign to combat Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD), as announced by Agriculture Minister John Steenhuisen. This campaign is fully funded by the state, ensuring that farmers do not incur any costs for the vaccines administered. The program is part of a broader effort to protect the national herd and mitigate the economic impact of FMD on the agricultural sector.

The vaccination drive is progressing steadily, with hundreds of thousands of animals being vaccinated each week. The target is to achieve 80% vaccination coverage of the national herd by December. To support this effort, South Africa has secured vaccine supplies from international sources, including one million doses from Biogen in Argentina and 1.5 million doses from Merial in the United States. Further consignments are scheduled to arrive to sustain the campaign.

Minister Steenhuisen highlighted the critical role of veterinary professionals and industry organizations, such as the Milk Producers' Organisation (MPO), in supporting the rollout. He also addressed concerns about misinformation, urging farmers and stakeholders to verify information before sharing it, as misinformation during a biosecurity crisis can harm the sector.

The minister clarified misconceptions about the cost of the Merial vaccines, explaining that the R45 bulk supply price per dose represents only the cost of production and international transport to a designated cold-storage facility in South Africa. This price does not account for the additional logistical and operational requirements of a large-scale vaccination program. These include quality checks, cold-chain maintenance, inventory management, secure storage, and coordinated distribution across provinces. The government's procurement cost reflects the full operational process needed to ensure vaccines are safely delivered to veterinarians for administration. Claims that the government is profiting from the vaccines were

categorically refuted, with Steenhuisen emphasizing that the vaccines are procured and administered free of charge to farmers.

Additionally, the minister dismissed claims that the government lacks the resources to fund the vaccination program, confirming that the Department of Agriculture has allocated sufficient funding for vaccine procurement. This effort is underscored by President Cyril Ramaphosa's declaration of FMD as a national disaster during the State of the Nation Address in February, which reinforces the seriousness of the situation and the state's responsibility to lead the response.

Steenhuisen stressed that controlling FMD requires collective responsibility across the livestock sector. He called for cooperation, science-based decision-making, and unity to overcome the disease. Farmers and stakeholders are encouraged to use the Department of Agriculture's official FMD Updates WhatsApp channel to access reliable and up-to-date information on vaccination schedules and disease control measures