

USCENTCOM HEALTH ADVISORY

There has been much reported in the press recently concerning a disease called “mad cow disease” (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) and its association with a disease in humans called new variant Creutzfeld-Jakob (nv CJD) disease. Both disorders are fatal brain diseases for which there is no treatment. It is not entirely certain how a human gets nv CJD, but it appears to be associated with eating meat that is infected with “mad cow disease”. No one has been able to positively identify the causative agent and it is uncertain if other ruminants such as goats, sheep, and lambs harbor the disease. The current outbreak of these diseases has been isolated to Europe and “mad cow disease” has never appeared in the United States. Beef products produced in the US are not at risk and may be consumed without concern.

Because of the potential human health risks associated with “mad cow disease”, the US Government, through a federal regulation, has banned the importation into the US of those animals and their products that may harbor the disease. The DOD has issued guidance to the services to comply with this regulation at all overseas military installations except as noted below.

The European community has taken strong Public Health measures to prevent “mad cow disease” infected meat from entering the human food chain, but isolated reports of cases persist. The current risk of acquiring nv CJD from eating European beef and beef products infected with this disease is extremely small (perhaps less than 1 case per 10 billion beef servings). However, to reduce the uncertainty associated with the origin of meat and further decrease the risk of disease, you should consider the following guidelines when traveling **anywhere** outside the US including the CENTCOM AOR.

1. Avoid beef, goat, sheep, lamb and their products purchased away from military installations.
2. Avoid beef, goat, sheep, lamb and their products on military installations that come from Morale Welfare and Recreation non-US vendor food service operations such as fests, cantines, mensas, imbis and schwarma stands.
3. If you elect to eat beef, goat, sheep, or lamb, select solid (steaks, roasts etc) products versus products such as burgers or sausages. Solid (muscle meat) products appear to reduce the risk of acquiring the disease.
4. Milk, milk products, poultry, and pork are believed to be safe for consumption.

This health advisory will be posted to the CENTCOM Surgeon’s web sites found through the classified and unclassified CENTCOM home pages. POCs are Lt Col (Dr) Stephen Niles and Major (Dr) Kevin Michaels at 8-6397.

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