

Mad-Cow Disease

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, or Mad-Cow disease, is a disease in cattle that causes the animal's brain to become spongy and degenerate. It can also affect the animal's spine and can be transmitted to humans who eat the infected animal.

Humans who eat the contaminated meat, may be infected with the disease known as Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease which can kill. But the mortality rate is low: scientists estimate the chance is 1 per 1.2 billions if we eat beef in an ordinary quantity.

Mad-cow disease and Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease are categorized as Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy. Patients who are infected with these diseases, their brain cells will appear "spongy" under microscope.

In human, the most common Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy is Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

People sometimes mix up these three diseases and think all are due to the eating of contaminated beef.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease is nerve-destroying, and often attacks the brain and spinal cord. The mortality rate of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease is also very low: between 1 and 2 in every million cases. It is not contracted through body contact. People can care for patients suffering from the disease without fear.

There is no known cure for it at present, and its origin is unclear.