



Canadian Health Coalition Coalition canadienne de la santé

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COMMUNIQUE

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OTTAWA — The Canadian Health Coalition (CHC) is calling on the Federal Minister of Health, the Hon. Pierre Pettigrew, to perform his statutory duty to protect Canadians against the spread of Mad Cow disease by immediately:

- 1) requiring the testing of all cattle prior to slaughter as is now happening in France and Japan; and
- 2) imposing a total ban on the dangerous practice of using animal protein in livestock feed.

Testing of all cattle being slaughtered for human consumption is required because Canada does not know how many cases of Mad Cow disease are present in its herds. We disagree with the industry position that it would be "prohibitively expensive" to test every cow prior to slaughter. The reality is that it would only cost a few cents per pound. The CHC contends that this is a small cost to pay when it comes to protecting Canadians from this horrific disease.

The CHC is also calling on the Federal Health Minister to immediately ban the dangerous beef industry practice of using animal protein in livestock feed. The CHC's position is that cows are herbivores and should not be forced to eat other animals. This dangerous and unnatural practice is what led to the spread of Mad Cow disease.

It is best to err on the side of caution when dealing with fatal transmissible disease like Mad Cow. The reality is scientists know very little about this disease. While only 150 people have died of Mad Cow disease to date, the incubation period in humans is estimated to be as long as 40 years -- so this may just be the tip of the iceberg.

Justice Krever concluded that Health Canada "*must not wait for scientific certainty about the spread of a transfusion-associated disease and the effectiveness of particular risk-reduction measures before they act to reduce risks.*" [Commission of Inquiry on the Blood System in Canada, Final Report, p. 994]. The CHC contends that what is true for the blood supply is true for the beef supply.

As Federal Minister of Health, Pierre Pettigrew, is responsible for "*the promotion and preservation of the health of the people of Canada*" and the "*protection of the people of Canada against risks to health and the spreading of diseases*" [Department of Health Act, 1996, s.4(1) and s.4(2)b]. This legislation places a statutory duty on the Health Minister to adopt precautionary measures before Canadians unknowingly come in contact with this disease.

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