

BRUCELLOSIS FACT SHEET

What is Brucellosis?

Brucellosis is an infection with bacteria from the Brucella group. Brucellosis is mainly a disease of animals that can be transmitted to people. Many different animals can be infected with brucellosis; some of the more common are cows, pigs, goats, sheep, deer, elk, moose or wild pigs. Brucellosis is not very common in the United States. It is common in countries in the Mediterranean, parts of Latin America, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe.

How do you get it?

People can be exposed to the bacteria by swallowing contaminated food or water; by inhaling (breathing) the bacteria, or by getting the bacteria in a skin wound. The most common way people are exposed is by eating or drinking unpasteurized milk or milk products from contaminated animals. Inhaling the bacteria or infecting a skin wound is less common but can be a significant hazard for people with certain occupations, such as laboratory or slaughterhouse workers. Hunters may be infected through skin wounds by handling or cleaning infected animals they have killed or by eating the contaminated meat.

What are the symptoms?

In people, brucellosis can cause a variety of symptoms ranging from flu like symptoms including fever, sweats, headaches, back pain and weakness. Serious infections of the central nervous system (spinal cord and brain) or lining of the heart can occur. Brucellosis can also cause long lasting or chronic symptoms that include recurring fevers, joint pain and extreme fatigue.

How soon do infected people get sick?

People infected with the brucella bacteria may not become ill until several weeks after exposure. The range of time for symptoms to begin can be 5 to 60 days, but it is usually 1 to 2 months.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to brucellosis?

If you have symptoms like those described for brucellosis and you have had exposure to unpasteurized milk or cheeses you should contact your doctor. Because the symptoms of brucellosis can be confused with other illnesses, diagnosis and treatment can be difficult. It is important to tell your doctor if your work can expose you to animals or if you have eaten unpasteurized cheeses, particularly from countries where brucellosis commonly occurs.

How can we prevent brucellosis?

The most effective way to prevent brucellosis is to avoid unpasteurized milk or milk products such as cheeses. People traveling to countries where brucellosis is common should not eat or purchase homemade “village cheeses”, because these are likely to be unpasteurized. Hunters and people working in high-risk occupations should use protective barriers (gloves, clothing, face shields) when handling potentially infected animals.

Where can I get more information on brucellosis?

www.cdc.gov

www.tdh.state.tx.us

Source of information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

www.hcphe.org

Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services
2223 West Loop South
Houston, TX 77027

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