

Q FEVER FACT SHEET

What is Q fever?

Q fever is included in a group of infections caused by a type of bacteria called rickettsia. The specific rickettsia that causes Q fever is called *Coxiella burnetii*. Q fever is normally an infection of animals, but does not usually cause illness.

How do you get it?

Cattle, sheep and goats are the primary animals that can be infected with Q fever, but infections have been seen in other types of livestock and in pets. People are usually exposed by breathing in airborne barnyard dust contaminated with dried placenta, other birth fluids, urine or feces of infected herd animals. Less common ways of exposure would be drinking raw milk or a bite from an infected tick (very rare). People at highest risk for this disease are farmers, sheep and dairy workers and veterinarians who care for farm animals.

What are the symptoms?

Most acute cases of Q fever will begin with high fever, severe headaches, body discomfort and fatigue. Sore throat, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, chest pain and dry cough can also occur. Pneumonia can develop in 30-50% of people with symptoms. Some can also develop hepatitis (inflammation of the liver). Chronic Q fever can cause damage to valves of the heart.

How soon do infected people get sick?

Only about 50% of all people infected with the bacteria will become ill. The time frame from exposure to development of symptoms is dependent on the number of bacteria a person is exposed to. Most people who get the disease will develop symptoms 2 to 3 weeks after exposure.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to Q fever?

If you think you have Q fever you should contact your doctor. Antibiotics are used to treat Q fever and are most effective when started within the first three days of illness. Chronic Q fever is much more difficult to treat and may require a combination of drugs and possible surgical repair of heart valves.

How can we prevent Q fever?

Prevention and control measures should be directed primarily towards those groups of people at greatest risk of exposure (veterinarians, meat processing plant workers, sheep and dairy farmers, livestock farmers and laboratory workers). Additional measures are to:

- Educate the public on sources of infection
- Appropriately dispose of contaminated barnyard materials
- Restrict access to known infected animals
- Drink and use only pasteurized milk and milk products

Where can I get more information on Q-fever?

www.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

Source of information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.hcphe.org>

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