



Q FEVER

What is Q fever?

Q fever is a zoonotic disease (diseases spread from animals to people) caused by the bacteria *Coxiella burnetii*. Q fever occurs worldwide and is usually found in domestic livestock (such as cattle, sheep, and goats). Q fever can occur in people exposed to infected animals or unpasteurized milk. Q fever is not common in Canada.

What are the symptoms of Q fever?

Symptoms usually appear within two to three weeks after exposure. Initial symptoms are similar to the flu and include fever, headache, fatigue, and muscle pain. Sore throat, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and chest pain can also develop. Most people recover. In a few cases, infection persists for more than six months and serious complications can develop.

How is Q fever spread?

The bacteria are found in milk, urine and feces from infected animals. During birthing, the bacteria are shed in high numbers within the amniotic or birth fluids and the placenta. The bacteria are resistant to heat and drying, and they survive for long periods in the environment. Infection of persons usually occurs by breathing in barnyard dust contaminated with bacteria from dried placental material, birth fluids and feces of infected animals. Other methods of transmission, such as tick bites, are rare.

How is Q fever diagnosed?

Q fever is diagnosed by symptoms, history of exposure and laboratory testing.

Who is at risk of Q fever infections?

Q fever is usually a result of occupational exposures (veterinarians, meat processing plant workers, farmers and laboratory researchers).

How can Q fever be prevented?

Practise good personal hygiene. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet, after handling animals, after handling raw meats and before preparing or eating food.

Practise basic food safety precautions. Thoroughly cook all meats (meat, poultry and seafood). Drink and eat only pasteurized dairy products (milk, cheese and yogurt).

Avoid water that might be contaminated. Do not drink untreated surface water.

Follow basic precautions when handling animals. Wear waterproof gloves and thoroughly wash hands after handling animals. Workers at facilities housing domestic livestock should follow good farming and animal husbandry practices, including appropriate disposal of all birthing tissues.

How is Q fever treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat Q fever.

What is the Public Health response?

Health care providers and laboratories must notify cases of Q fever to Public Health. Public Health staff may interview the health care provider and patient (or caregivers) to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people at risk of infection, implement control measures and provide other advice.

Further Information

For additional information, contact your healthcare provider, local [Public Health office](#), or Telecare 811.

Useful websites:

Public Health Agency of Canada
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca