



FACT SHEET

Q Fever

What is it?

- Q Fever is a disease caused by a type of bacteria named *Coxiella burnetii*
- Q fever is primarily a disease of cattle, sheep, and goats. Other livestock and pets can also get Q fever. Most animals have no symptoms; *C. burnetii* infection may cause abortion in sheep and goats.

Symptoms

- Only about 50% of all people infected with *C. burnetii* become ill, but the illness can be severe. Symptoms of acute Q fever cases may include:
 - High fever
 - Weakness
 - Dry cough
 - Confusion
 - Chills and sweats
 - Chest pain
 - Severe headache
 - Muscle ache
 - Vomiting
 - Diarrhea
 - Abdominal pain
- Fever usually lasts for 1 to 2 weeks and most cases recover within a couple of months without treatment. Weight loss and pneumonia are common
- Chronic Q fever is uncommon but much more serious and can affect the heart. It is more common in persons with heart disease, cancer, chronic kidney disease, or organ transplants.

How is it spread?

- Infection occurs by inhaling dust contaminated by dried placental material, birth fluids, as well as urine and feces from infected animals.
- The risk of infection is greatest close to the source of bacteria, but there have been cases of infection even several miles away.

- Accidentally inhaling contaminated milk is a less common way of infection.

Diagnosis and Treatment

- Q fever infection is diagnosed with blood tests or by finding the organism in tissues using DNA detection methods.
- Antibiotic treatment is most effective if started early in the course of the illness.
- Chronic Q fever infection of the heart is very difficult to treat. Treatment may take several years and sometimes requires surgery to remove the damaged heart valves.

Prevention

- Avoid exposure to infected animals, especially if you have heart-valve disease or vascular grafts.
- Precautions for persons who work with animals (i.e., veterinarians, meat processing plant workers, sheep and dairy workers, livestock farmers, and researchers at facilities housing sheep) include:
 - Appropriate disposal of placenta, other birth products and aborted fetuses of sheep and goats.
 - Restricted access to laboratories and barns with infected or at-risk animals.
 - Use of appropriate procedures for bagging and disinfecting work clothes.
- Consume only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- Q fever vaccine is not commercially available in the United States.

Report all cases to El Paso Department of Public Health by calling 915-771-5810