



Q Fever

What is Q Fever?

Q fever (Query fever) is an infectious disease that spreads from animals to humans. Q fever is found all over the world and is caused by the bacteria *Coxiella burnetii*. The bacteria can survive for months and even years in dust or soil. Bacteria is highly resistant to many disinfectants.

How is it spread?

Animals such as cattle, sheep, and goats can carry the Q fever bacteria in tissues involved in birth such as the uterus, placenta, and birth fluids. Infected animals also release the bacteria in milk and manure. People acquire the infection by inhaling infectious aerosols and contaminated dusts generated by animals or animal products (contaminated wool, straw, laundry). People can also get Q fever by drinking infected milk. Person to person transmission occurs rarely, if ever.

What symptoms should I watch for?

People can have Q fever without knowing it or mistake it for mild flu. Often, it is impossible to tell without laboratory tests. There are two forms of Q fever: acute and chronic. It usually takes about 20 days after exposure to the bacteria for acute symptoms to occur. Most cases are mild, yet some severe cases have been reported. Most acute cases recover completely, a small group can get post-Q fever fatigue syndrome with constant or periods of fatigue, night sweats, severe headaches, photophobia, pain in muscles and joints, mood changes and difficulty sleeping.

Symptoms for acute Q fever include:

- High fever
- Chills and sweating
- Severe headache
- Weakness
- Muscle pain
- Loss of appetite

Symptoms of chronic Q fever may include:

- Chills
- Fatigue
- Night sweats
- Prolonged fever
- Shortness of breath

Most symptoms disappear after 7-10 days. However, afflicted people can feel generally ill with loss of appetite for several weeks. A small percentage of patients may develop endocarditis, an inflammation of the lining of the heart or hepatitis, which affects the liver. Chronic Q fever can develop years after first infection.

What is the treatment for Q Fever?

Antibiotics are available for the treatment of Q Fever. Prompt treatment can prevent early Q fever from becoming chronic. See your health care provider to discuss these options.

How do I protect myself and others?

- Ensure rubber gloves are worn when handling or caring for animals.
- Wash your hands often, especially after touching/petting an animal or handling animal carcasses.
- Children should be instructed not to handle sick or dead animals.
- Do not drink or consume unpasteurized milk or dairy products from cows, goats or sheep.
- Sick animals should be seen by a veterinarian.
- Routine practices should be used for handling clinical materials.
- Carefully dispose of animal products that may be infected.
- Need adequate disinfection for surfaces where possible exposure.

Is there anything special I need to know?

Q fever is more an occupational concern for workers who have contact with animals, animal products, or animal waste. Those workers with heart valve problems or suppressed immune systems are at higher risk.

Q fever is a special concern with pregnant animals, especially around the time they give birth or abort because of the disease. In pregnant animals, the Q fever bacteria builds up to enormous numbers in certain tissues and fluids.

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809



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