



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. The bacteria are 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 bacteria in milk and manure. People can get sick by inhaling dust or spray from the infected animal's body fluids (contaminated wool, straw, laundry). People can also get Q fever by drinking milk from the animal with Q Fever. Person to person transmission is very rare.

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 2-3 weeks but anywhere between 3-30 days after exposure to the bacteria for acute symptoms to occur. Chronic Q fever can develop within a few weeks to years after the initial acute infection.

Most cases are mild and recover completely, yet some severe cases have been reported. Some people can get chronic Q fever fatigue syndrome presenting with constant or periods of fatigue, night sweats, severe headaches, photophobia, pain in muscles and joints, mood changes and difficulty sleeping.

Symptoms of acute (primary) Q fever include:

- High fever
- Chills and sweating
- Severe headache
- Weakness
- Muscle pain including abdominal and chest
- Non-productive cough or pneumonia
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea

Symptoms of chronic (persistent) Q fever may include:

- Chills
- Fatigue
- Night sweats
- Prolonged fever

- Shortness of breath
- Endocarditis, osteomyelitis, chronic hepatitis

Most symptoms disappear after 7-10 days. However, some people can feel generally ill with loss of appetite for several weeks. Chronic Q fever can develop years after the 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. Pregnant women who become infected may be at risk of early delivery, miscarriage or stillbirth.

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 build up to enormous numbers in certain tissues and fluids.

For information call Infectious Diseases: ext. 8809.



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