

Q FEVER

What is Q fever?

Q Fever is caused by a bacterium. It was first recognized in Queensland, Australia, in 1937. Since then, cases have been reported from around the world. Individuals who have frequent direct contact with animals, including veterinarians, meat workers, and sheep and dairy farmers, are at higher risk. Q fever is rarely fatal.

How do you get Q fever?

Most patients get Q fever by coming in contact with animals infected with the Q fever bacteria, their tissues, or fluids. Transmission may occur through breathing contaminated air or dust from an area with a large concentration of animals. Tissues from animals giving birth pose a particular risk. People can also become infected indirectly from animals through contaminated materials like wool, straw, and fertilizer. Transmission by tick bites can occur, but is rare in the United States. There is a risk of Q fever from consumption of contaminated raw milk.

How does the bacteria maintain itself in nature?

Sheep, cattle, goats, cats, dogs, some wild animals such as bobcats and rodents, birds, and ticks carry the bacteria. Most infected animals do not show signs of illness, but Q fever may sometimes cause abortion. The bacterium can be shed in large numbers when an infected animal gives birth.

What are the signs and symptoms of Q fever?

Only about one-half of all people infected with *C. burnetii* show signs of illness. For patients who become ill, the first symptoms of Q fever resemble the flu and may include fever, chills, sweats, headache, and weakness. Q fever may rarely progress to affect the liver, nervous system, or heart valve.

How is Q fever diagnosed?

Q fever is diagnosed by identifying the bacteria in tissues or through a blood test that detects antibody to the organism.

What treatment is recommended for Q fever patients?

Patients with mild transient illness usually do not require treatment. Patients with severe Q fever infection may be treated with two to three weeks of antibiotics. Patients with heart valve deformities should see their doctor for treatment to prevent infection of their heart valve. If treatment is delayed until late (i.e., heart) symptoms occur, patients may need to take antibiotics for months or years. If permanent damage to the heart valve occurs, surgery may be necessary.

How can Q fever be prevented?

Placenta, other birth products, and aborted fetuses should be disposed of immediately. Owners should seek veterinary assistance if their animals have reproductive or other health problems.

Where can I find more information on Q fever?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has information available at their website <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/qfever/index.htm>.