



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 fevers
 - severe headache
 - weakness
 - muscle ache
 - sore throat
 - nausea
 - dry cough
 - vomiting
 - confusion
 - diarrhea
 - chills and sweats
 - abdominal pain
 - chest 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 illness.
- ✓ Chronic Q fever infection of the heart is very difficult to treat. Treatment may take several years and sometimes requires surgery to remove 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 the 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 & disinfecting work clothes.
- ✓ Consume only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- ✓ Q fever vaccine is not commercially available in the United States.

**Report all King County cases to
Public Health by calling (206) 296-4774.**

Available in alternate formats.