



Understanding Q Fever

What is Q fever?

- Q fever is a disease in people and animals caused by the germ (bacteria) *Coxiella burnetii*.
- In animals, the disease is also known as coxiellosis (pronounced cox·e·el·low·sis).

What are the symptoms of Q fever in animals?

- Infected animals usually appear healthy.
- Infected, pregnant animals may experience abortions late in pregnancy.

Who is at risk?

Anyone who has contact with animals infected with Q fever bacteria, especially people who work on farms or with animals. Examples of high-risk jobs include:

- Livestock farmers
- Slaughterhouse workers
- Veterinarians
- Animal or laboratory researchers

How is it spread?

Q fever is most commonly spread to people by infected farm animals, including goats, cattle, and sheep.

People can get Q fever by:

- Breathing in dust that contains Q fever bacteria.
- Handling feces, urine, milk, or blood from an infected animal.
- Handling a newborn animal or birthing products (placenta, birth fluids) from an infected animal.
- Drinking raw (unpasteurized) milk.



What are the signs, symptoms, and treatment for Q fever in people?

About half of people infected with Q fever bacteria will get sick with a flu-like illness. People may feel sick 2–3 weeks after becoming infected. A healthcare provider can prescribe antibiotics to treat Q fever.

Signs and symptoms can include:

- High fever
- Feeling tired
- Chills or sweats
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Cough
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Chest pain

What is chronic Q fever?

A very small number of people with Q fever (less than 1 out of 20) develop a more severe illness called chronic Q fever. Chronic Q fever can result in infection of heart valves (called endocarditis). Symptoms may not appear until months or years after initial infection.

Chronic Q fever is more likely to occur in people:

- With heart valve or blood vessel disease
- Who have had a heart valve replaced
- With weakened immune systems
- Who were pregnant when they first had Q fever

Take steps to reduce your exposure.

- There is no vaccine to prevent infection in the United States.
- Avoid contact with infected animals during birthing when possible. If you assist in animal deliveries or have contact with birth products, protect yourself by wearing:
 - » Gloves
 - » Eye protection (e.g., goggles)
 - » Protective clothing (e.g., coveralls and boots)
 - » Masks (an N95 or higher respirator is the most effective type of mask for protecting against Q fever bacteria)
 - » Talk to your healthcare provider about whether it is safe for you to wear a mask or respirator
 - » Talk to your employer about additional Occupational Safety and Health Administration requirements that may apply
- Shower and change your clothes and shoes after working with animals.
- Eat and drink only pasteurized milk and milk products (cheese, cream, butter).



What should I do if I am worried about Q fever?

- Contact your healthcare provider if you think you have Q fever or are at risk for chronic Q fever. Tell your provider if you work or have worked with farm animals.
- Contact your veterinarian if you think your animals might have Q fever.
- A healthcare provider can prescribe antibiotics to treat Q fever.

For more information, please visit the website at

cdc.gov/qfever