

# Brucellosis

## Personal Health Fact Sheet

### **What is Brucellosis?**

*Brucellosis is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria of the genus Brucella. These bacteria are primarily passed among animals, and they cause disease in many vertebrates. Various Brucella species affect sheep, goats, cattle, deer, elk, pigs, dogs and several other animals. Humans become infected by coming in contact with animals or animal products that are contaminated with these bacteria.*

### **How is it spread?**

Humans are generally infected in one of three ways: eating or drinking something that is contaminated with *Brucella*, breathing in the organism (inhalation), or having the bacteria enter the body through skin wounds. The most common way to be infected is by eating or drinking contaminated milk products. When sheep, goats, cows, or camels are infected, their milk is contaminated with the bacteria. If the milk is not pasteurized, these bacteria can be transmitted to persons who drink the milk or eat cheeses made from it. Inhalation is not a common route of infection, but it can be a significant hazard for people in certain occupations, such as those working in the laboratory where the organism is cultured and in a slaughterhouse. Contamination of skin wounds may be a problem for persons working in slaughterhouses or meat packing plants or for veterinarians. Hunters may be infected through skin wounds or by accidentally ingesting the bacteria after cleaning deer, elk, moose or wild pigs that they have killed.

### **How is it treated?**

Treatment is difficult but doctors can prescribe effective antibiotics. Usually doxycycline and rifampin are used in combination for 6 weeks to prevent reoccurring infection. The reason for the length of therapy is that it is not known where the bacteria may hide in the body, and they could cause infection in places like the bone marrow. Infection often recurs with short-course therapy.

### **How can we prevent Brucellosis?**

Do not consume unpasteurized milk, cheese, or ice cream while traveling. Hunters and animal herdsman should use rubber gloves when handling internal organs of animals. There is no vaccine available for humans.

### **SYMPTOMS OF Brucellosis**

Incubation period is usually 5 to 60 days before symptoms appear.

- ▶ Mild flu-like illness
- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Sweats
- ▶ Headaches
- ▶ Back pains
- ▶ Physical weakness
- ▶ May cause severe infections of the central nervous system or lining of the heart
- ▶ May cause long-lasting or chronic symptoms that include recurrent fevers, joint pain and fatigue



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