

# Q-Fever

## Personal Health Fact Sheet

### **What is Q-Fever?**

*Q-Fever is a zoonotic disease caused by *Coxiella burnetii*, a species of bacteria that is distributed globally. Cattle, sheep, and goats are the primary reservoirs of *C. burnetii*. Organisms are excreted in milk, urine, and feces of infected animals. Most importantly, during birthing the organisms are shed in high numbers within the amniotic fluids and the placenta. These organisms are resistant to heat, drying, and many common disinfectants. These features enable the bacteria to survive for long periods in the environment. Humans are often very susceptible to the disease, and very few organisms may be required to cause infection.*

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

Q-Fever is commonly transmitted by airborne dissemination of bacteria from barnyard dust that contains dried placental material, birth fluids, and excreta of infected herd animals. Airborne particles containing organisms may be carried downwind for one-half mile or more. Ingestion of contaminated milk, followed by regurgitation and inspiration of the contaminated food, is a less common mode of transmission.

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

Doxycycline is the treatment of choice for acute Q-Fever. Antibiotic treatment is most effective when initiated within the first 3 days of illness. Most patients will recover to good health within several months without any treatment.

### **How can we prevent Q-Fever?**

A vaccine has been developed, but it is not commercially available in the United States. Standard precautions include wearing gloves when handling items or surfaces potentially soiled with blood or body fluids, and non-intact skin. Masks should be worn if coughing, and gowns to prevent potential splash or splattering. In addition, public health education should be used. Use only pasteurized milk or milk products; vaccinate individuals engaged in research with pregnant sheep or live *C. burnetii*; quarantine imported animals; appropriately dispose of placenta, birth products, fetal membranes, and aborted fetuses at facilities housing sheep and goats; and ensure that holding facilities for sheep are located away from populated areas.

### **SYMPTOMS OF Q-Fever**

**The incubation period is 2-3 weeks.**

- High fever (can last up to 2 weeks)
- Malaise (feeling of illness)
- Muscular pain
- Severe headache
- Sore throat
- Chills/Sweats
- Cough
- Nausea/Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain
- Chest pain

Some individuals may develop pneumonia. Majority will have abnormal liver function and some will develop hepatitis.



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