

IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

Q FEVER

Q Fever is a disease caused by bacteria called *Coxiella burnetii*, which can affect the lungs, liver, heart, and other parts of the body. This disease is found worldwide, mainly in animals.

Symptoms

Only about half the people infected show the symptoms. For those who do, symptoms usually appear within 2 to 3 weeks, including:

- high fever (up to 105° F) with chills and sweats that comes on suddenly and lasts 1 to 2 weeks.
- severe headache, general bad feeling, muscle pain, confusion
- sore throat, dry cough, and chest pain
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain
- In general, most patients will recover within several months. Less than 2% of people die, but up to 50% may develop pneumonia or problems with the liver.
- In a few cases, the infection could last longer than 6 months and affect the heart valves.

Transmission

- The bacteria can be found in the milk, urine, and feces (poop) of infected animals. Most importantly, when an animal gives birth, large amounts of the bacteria are present within the fluids and placenta. Cattle, sheep, and goats are most likely to carry *C. burnetii*, although other pets and livestock can be infected. Most infected animals don't show any symptoms.
- The organisms can survive for long periods in the environment. Infection of humans usually occurs by inhalation of these organisms found in airborne barnyard dust. Humans are often susceptible to the disease, and very few organisms may be required to cause infection.
- Most cases in the U.S. result from on the job exposure and typically involve veterinarians, meat processing plant workers, sheep and dairy workers, livestock farmers, and animal researchers.
- Occasionally, people can get Q fever from drinking contaminated milk or from tick bites.
- Direct human to human transmission can occur but is rare.

Treatment

- Diagnosis of Q fever requires laboratory testing of blood for antibodies or bacteria.
- Antibiotics, such as Doxycycline, are effective in treating Q fever. Severe cases may require hospitalization and the use of more than one antibiotic, sometimes for several years.

Prevention

- No vaccine is currently available in the United States.
- When possible, avoid contact with the placenta, birth fluids and tissues, and aborted fetuses of sheep, cattle, and goats. Wear gloves and properly dispose of all birth related tissues.
- Eat and drink only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- If you have pre-existing heart valve disease, avoid areas with sheep, cattle, and goats.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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