

Basic Fact Sheet – Q Fever in Animals

Texas Department of Health

What is Q fever?

Q fever is caused by a rickettsia (*Coxiella burnetii*), which is a microscopic (tiny) organism. Many kinds of wild and domestic animals and humans can get this disease.

How can an animal get Q fever?

Infected animals spread Q fever naturally by direct contact, through aerosols (bacteria suspended in the air), or through their milk. Therefore, infected livestock should not be used for milk. Insects and other items that were in contact with the infected animal can also spread the disease. Ticks can be infected with *C. burnetii*, but they are not thought to commonly spread the disease.

What are the signs of Q fever?

Unlike people, animals with Q fever usually do not get sick. People who get the disease usually have a flu-like illness, but more serious cases with brain and heart problems can occur.

How is Q fever diagnosed?

Since animals infected with Q fever usually do not get sick, the only way to be certain they are infected is through laboratory testing.

How is Q fever treated?

Animals with Q fever are usually not treated. Antibiotics do not usually kill all the disease organisms.

Is a Q fever vaccine available?

Vaccines to protect cattle and humans against Q fever are not available in the US.

Can infected animals spread Q fever?

Yes. The organism can be found in the body fluids of infected animals (blood, milk, oral and nasal secretions, urine, and vaginal discharges) for many years. The organism can also be spread in the air from infected animals, hides, placental tissues and fluids, and wool. *C. burnetii* can live in the environment for months. People also can get the disease by drinking raw milk containing the organism. Spread of the disease from person-to-person is unlikely.

What is done with animals that die of Q fever?

There are no special burial or disposal requirements.

How can I protect my animals and myself?

Disinfect areas in contact with the infected animals with a mixture of one part household bleach (0.5% hypochlorite) in nine parts water. Apply to all surfaces and wash off with water after waiting at least 30 minutes