



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

Oahu 586-4586, Maui 984-8213, Hilo 933-0912,

Kona 322-4877, Kauai 241-3563

Q Fever

What is Q fever?

Q fever is a disease caused by bacteria called *Coxiella burnetii*. These bacteria can be found in cattle, sheep, goats and other domestic animals. These bacteria could be developed for use in biological warfare and is considered a potential terrorist threat.

How is it spread?

The bacteria can be found in milk, urine and feces of infected animals. Also, during birthing, there are a large number of the organisms in the birthing fluids and after-birth. People can become infected by breathing in barnyard dust contaminated with dried birthing materials and fluids, or solid wastes of infected animals. Eating or drinking unpasteurized milk products can also cause disease. Person to person spread is very rare.

What are the symptoms of Q fever?

The disease begins suddenly, with high fevers, headache, confusion, sore throat, dry cough, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain and chest pain.

Many people infected with Q fever will not have any symptoms.

When do symptoms start?

Most patients become ill within 2-3 weeks after exposure to the bacteria.

How is Q fever treated?

Most people who are sick with Q fever will recover without antibiotic treatment. However, for people who develop Q fever disease, treatment with antibiotics is recommended.

If you get it once, can you get it again?

No. Once you have had Q fever, you should not get it again.

How can you keep from getting it?

There is no vaccine available for Q fever in the United States.

Certain professions are at increased risk for exposure to *C. burnetii*, including veterinarians, meat processing plant workers, dairy workers, livestock farmers, and researchers at facilities housing sheep and goats.

Some ways to prevent the spread of Q fever are:

- Avoid contact with animals, especially while animals are giving birth.
- Properly dispose of birth products from cattle, sheep and goats.
- Restrict access to barns and laboratories housing possibly infected animals.
- Use only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- Quarantine imported animals.
- Locate holding pens for sheep and goats away from areas where there are a lot of people. Animals should be tested for exposure to *C. burnetii*.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/qfever/>