



Q Fever:

Guidance for livestock owners

April 2023

What is Q fever?

Q fever is an illness caused by the bacteria *Coxiella burnetii*. It can infect sheep, goats, cattle, and other animals. The disease got the name “query fever” or “Q fever” when it first appeared because doctors didn’t know what caused it.

How do animals get Q fever?

Infected animals shed the bacteria in urine, manure, milk, and birthing fluids. Bacteria can also be found in soil and on hair or wool.

What are the signs of Q fever in animals?

The main signs of Q fever in animals are:

- Abortion or stillbirth
- Infertility
- Mastitis (udder infection)
- Metritis (infection of the uterus)

How is Q fever diagnosed in animals?

A laboratory can test placentas, blood, milk, and manure for Q fever. Q fever can be common in sheep and goats, so a diagnosis of Q fever, especially in blood, does not always mean that it caused disease.

How do you prevent Q fever in animals?

- Keep pregnant livestock separate from other animals.
- Avoid overcrowding animals during kidding, lambing, or calving season.
- Practice good hygiene between animals.
- Remove any stillborn or aborted fetuses and placentas quickly.

Can people get Q fever?

Yes. Q fever most commonly affects people who work on farms, especially those who help with animal birthing, and those who come in contact with farm

animals, like veterinarians, sheep shearers, and slaughterhouse workers. People who inhale contaminated dust or eat or drink raw or unpasteurized animal products can also be affected.

What are the symptoms of Q fever in people?

Pregnant women and those with chronic diseases are at highest risk for severe Q fever. The disease can cause:

- Pregnancy complications and miscarriage
- Fever and chills
- Extreme fatigue
- Muscle aches
- Headaches
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Cough or chest pain

How can workers protect themselves?

Workers should wear gloves and masks when handling birthing fluids or possibly infected animals. Pregnant women should not assist with premature births or abortions in small ruminants. Do not drink raw milk.

What do I do if I suspect that I or one of my workers has Q fever?

Anyone showing symptoms of Q fever should see a doctor. You can also visit ualhd.org to find your local health department for more information.

