

# Q fever

## FACT SHEET



## What is Q fever?

Q fever is an infectious zoonotic disease caused by a bacteria called *Coxiella burnetii*.

It can be transmitted from animals to humans.



**Q fever is everywhere in the world, except New Zealand!**

## How is it spread?

Infection is almost always spread to people through direct or indirect contact with animals such as cattle, sheep and goats. Kangaroos, wallabies, ticks, bandicoots, dogs and cats have also been found to be infected with Q fever.



**Reptiles have not been identified as carriers of Q fever!**

## How does it pass from animals to humans?

### Direct contact with:

- Faeces, urine or blood from an infected animal
- Drinking raw (unpasteurised) milk of an infected animal
- Slaughtering or butchering infected animals
- Observing or assisting with animal births and contact with infected birthing fluids (tissue, placenta, blood, mucus)
- Contaminated wool, hides, straw, manure and clothes
- Herding, shearing or transporting infected animals
- A bite from a tick that has fed on an infected animal

### Indirect contact by:

- Breathing in infected dust or air particles
- Working or visiting environments contaminated by infected animal and tick excretions



**Heat, drying and sunlight does not kill the bacteria spores!**

## Who is at risk?

- People working in occupations such as vets and vet nurses, meat processing and abattoir workers, farmers, wildlife and zoo workers, shearers, animal transporters, dog and cat breeders, animal refuge workers, gardeners and horticulturists
- Pregnant women, elderly and people with weak immune systems are more likely to have severe illness or complications
- Other activities such as visiting farms, zoos and animal shows, attending animal births, handling animal materials, exposure to dust and soil in which the bacteria can stay for many years



Yes, you still can touch your pet dog and cat!

## What are the symptoms?

### In animals:

Animals with Q fever usually do not show any signs of it. Animals look healthy even when infected so it is hard to know if they have Q fever!

### In humans:

**Subclinical** - mild infection with no or few symptoms

**Acute** - a severe flu-like illness lasting two to six weeks

### Symptoms may include:

- Fever, chills or profuse sweating
- Fatigue
- Headaches, sore throat, cough, muscle aches
- Nausea
- Upper respiratory problems
- Weight loss.

**Chronic** - illness affecting the heart, bones and joints, which can cause fatigue syndrome and prolonged ill health that can last more than 12 months.



Q fever is rarely spread from person to person through blood transfusion or mother-to-baby transmission!

## How is Q fever prevented and treated?

### Prevention:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soapy water after touching animals or animal products and before eating or drinking
- Eat and drink only pasteurised products
- Shower and change clothes and shoes after contact with animals
- Disinfect clothes if highly animal soiled
- When camping or in rural environments, take soap and hand sanitiser with you (wash hands for at least 20 seconds)
- Wear protective equipment if assisting with animal births (P2 masks, gloves etc.)



People who have previously caught Q fever are believed to be immune to future infection!

## Vaccination and treatment

- Vaccination (Q-VAX®) is the best way to prevent Q fever infection, recommended for people over 15 years of age who work in at risk occupations or at risk of exposure to Q fever
- If you think you might be at risk of Q fever, please see your doctor for further advice



Yes the vaccine is safe!