



Brucellosis

Fact Sheet

What is brucellosis?

Brucellosis is an infectious disease caused by various types of the bacteria *Brucella*. The bacteria are primarily found on animals such as sheep, goats, cattle, deer, elk, pigs, and dogs.

Where is it usually found?

As a result of animal vaccination control programs, Brucellosis is not common in North America. It is common in countries where public health and domestic animal health programs are not standardized. Unpasteurized cheeses, sometimes called “village cheeses”, from high risk areas may represent a particular risk to tourists.

How is it spread to humans?

Humans become infected by coming in contact with contaminated animals or animal products. This can happen by eating or drinking something contaminated (such as unpasteurized milk or cheese), breathing in the bacteria (lab workers or slaughterhouse employees), or when the bacteria enters the body through skin wounds. Direct person-to person spread is very rare.

What are the symptoms?

Flu-like symptoms can occur including fever, sweats, headaches, back pains, and physical weakness. Severe infections of the central nervous system or the lining of the heart may occur. It can also cause long-lasting or chronic symptoms that include recurrent fevers, joint pain, and fatigue.

Is there a way to prevent infection?

Consume only pasteurized milk, cheese, or ice cream while travelling. Avoid dairy products if unsure that they have been pasteurized. Hunters and animal herdsman should use rubber gloves when handling the internal organs of animals. There is no vaccine available for humans. Thorough hand washing is the best prevention.

How is it diagnosed?

It is diagnosed when the bacteria is found in samples of blood or bone marrow. Blood tests can be done to detect antibodies against the bacteria. With this method two blood samples are collected 2 weeks apart.

Is there treatment available?

Yes. Doctors usually prescribe 2 antibiotics (doxycycline and rifampin) used in combination for 6 weeks to prevent recurring infection. Depending on the timing of treatment and severity of illness, recovery may take a few weeks to several months.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Brucellosis, 2007.
- Heymann D. L., (2008). Control of Communicable Diseases Manual. (19th Ed.) Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

CD-207

2011/08/03

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