

What is Q Fever?

Q fever is an infectious disease caused by a rickettsia organism called *Coxiella burnetii*. Cattle, sheep and goats are the primary reservoirs. Infection has been noted in a wide variety of other animals, including other breeds of livestock and domesticated pets, as well as ticks and birds. It does not usually cause symptoms in these animals, although abortion in goats and sheep has been linked to this germ.

Human infection usually occurs by inhalation of dust infected with contaminated animal materials like dried placental material, birth fluids, and excreta of infected herd animals.

What are the symptoms?

Only about one-half of all people infected with this germ show signs of illness. Most acute cases of Q fever begin with sudden onset of one or more of the following: high fever, severe headache, general malaise, muscle soreness, confusion, sore throat, chills, sweats, non-productive cough, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and chest pain. Fever usually lasts for one to two weeks. Weight loss can occur and persist for some time.

Up to one-half of patients who have symptoms from this germ will develop pneumonia, while a majority of patients will have abnormal liver function tests.

Chronic Q fever, an infection that persists for more than six months, is uncommon but is a much more serious disease. Patients who have had acute Q fever may develop the chronic form as soon as one year, or as long as 20 years, after initial infection.

Most patients become ill within two to three weeks after exposure. Those who recover fully from infection may possess lifelong immunity against re-infection.

How is it treated?

Antibiotics will be provided by your physician for treatment.

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

Reference

- Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Diseases: Q Fever, January 2003

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