

Q Fever

What is Q Fever?

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

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 of Q Fever?

Only about one-half of all people infected with *C. burnetii* show signs of clinical illness. Most acute cases of Q fever begin with sudden onset of one or more of the following: high fever, severe headache, general malaise (e.g. out of sorts), muscle soreness, confusion, sore throat, chills, sweats, non-productive cough (e.g. dry cough), nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and chest pain. Fever usually lasts for 1 to 2 weeks. Weight loss can occur and last for some time.

Up to half of patients with a symptomatic infection will develop pneumonia while a majority of patients will have abnormal results on liver function tests.

Chronic Q fever, characterized by infection that persists for more than 6 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 2 to 3 weeks after exposure. Those who recover fully from infection may possess lifelong immunity against re-infection.

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.

Source: Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Public Health Division.

**For further information contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.**

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