

# FAQs: Q Fever

Q fever (*Coxiella burnetii*) is a highly contagious zoonotic disease found throughout the world (except New Zealand). Many species of domestic and wild animals, as well as people, can become infected with *C. burnetii*. The organism, which is shed in the feces, milk, urine and birthing fluids, has a long survival rate in the environment and is easily aerosolized. Depending on the severity of infection, animals and people can suffer effects ranging from very mild to severe.

## What species can get Q fever?

Cattle, sheep and goats are most frequently associated with cases of Q fever. The bacteria can be carried by many other species, including cats, dogs and other mammals, birds, reptiles and arthropods. Humans are also susceptible.

## How is Q fever spread?

Aerolized particles is the most common mode of transmission, particularly in dusty environments. *C. burnetii* has a long survival period in the environment, capable of living beyond a year in some settings. Exposure to birthing fluids is also a high-risk factor, as well as consuming unpasteurized milk. Some species of ticks can also spread the disease.

## What are the clinical signs of Q Fever?

Signs of Q fever present in many ways, including

no noticeable signs. Sheep, goats and cattle may experience reproductive issues, including stillbirths, abortions, infertility and weak offspring. Other signs are fever, lethargy or anorexia.

## Can Q fever be prevented?

Prevention can be difficult. All producers should minimize herd/flock contact with wildlife and control ticks. Test purchased animals before introducing them to the herd. Regular cleaning and disinfection (with a 10% bleach solution) of birthing areas can help reduce the amount of bacteria in the environment. No vaccine is approved for use in the United States.

## What is the risk to humans?

Most exposures are related to ruminants, especially during the birthing process. An Iowa State University study has shown higher infection rates among people who have occupational exposure. Symptoms vary widely from none to mild, flu-like to more serious conditions.

## What to do if I suspect exposure?

For potential pet or livestock exposure, contact a veterinarian. In cases of possible human exposure, contact a physician. Be sure to mention any animal contact the doctor may want to consider in the diagnosis.

