
DISEASES : Q Fever

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

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.

Symptoms

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, 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 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 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.

Treatment*

Antibiotics will be provided by your physician for treatment.

Further Information

Anyone with concerns or questions about Q fever : please contact your physician or the staff of your local public health unit.

References

The information provided is subject to change. The information was collated from the following three sources :

1. Chin, J. "Control of Communicable Diseases Manual". 17th Edition. 2000. American Public Health Association: Washington D.C.
2. Health Canada website
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website

*Advice on the most up-to-date treatment should be sought from a clinical expert.

Government of Ontario

For information about health services and resources :

www.health.gov.on.ca

For consumer-friendly health tips and information :

www.HealthyOntario.com

INFOline: 1-877-234-4343;

TTY: 1-800-387-5559

Telehealth Ontario:

1-866-797-0000; TTY 1-866-797-0007

INFOline is open during business hours and can provide general information on healthcare.

Telehealth Ontario is a 24/7 service which uses nurse practitioners to answer your immediate health concerns.