


Q FEVER

(Query fever, coxiellosis)




Q fever is caused by the bacterium *Coxiella burnetii*. Found worldwide, it commonly infects cattle, sheep, and goats, and can also infect pets. Humans can become infected when they come into contact with infected animals or animal products, or are near places where infected animals live. Veterinarians, meat processors, livestock farmers, and others who care for pregnant cattle, sheep, and goats are at highest risk for exposure to *Coxiella burnetii*.

What causes it?

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- ▶ In infected animals, the bacteria may be found in large numbers in placentas, aborted fetuses, and fluids related to giving birth. It can also be found in their milk, stool, and urine.
 - ▶ People are usually infected when they breathe in dust contaminated with the bacteria.
 - ▶ The bacteria can live for a long time in the environment on dirt, dust, floors, and bedding. This means people who do not have direct contact with animals can still become ill.


What are the signs and symptoms?




Most people with Q fever do not have symptoms. For those who do, the symptoms can vary widely. People who have a weakened immune system, heart disease, or are pregnant are more likely to suffer chronic and/or severe symptoms, such as:

- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Cough and/or pneumonia
- ▶ Headaches, sometimes severe
- ▶ Muscle pain
- ▶ Liver inflammation (hepatitis)
- ▶ Infection of the inner layer of the heart and heart valves (endocarditis)
- ▶ Pre-term delivery or miscarriage

What are the treatment options?

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- ▶ It can be difficult to tell if someone has Q fever. Blood tests can be done to see if the body's immune system is responding to an infection. Health care providers can also use the person's animal exposure history along with their signs and symptoms to help diagnose Q fever.
 - ▶ Antibiotics are used to treat Q fever. People with heart infections may also need surgery.

How can it be prevented?

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- ▶ It is important to wear gloves, masks, and protective eyewear when helping with births of pregnant cattle, goats, or sheep.
 - ▶ Those who have a history of heart disease, weakened immune system, or who are pregnant, should consider avoiding all contact with cattle, goats, and sheep.
 - ▶ Avoid raw sheep, goat, or cow milk products.

