



**PUBLIC HEALTH FACT  
SHEET**

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# Brucellosis

## What is brucellosis?

Brucellosis is an infection caused by a family of bacteria called *Brucellae*. It is most commonly found in animals, but has rarely been diagnosed in humans who have contact with infected animals. The fact that human cases are often seen in slaughterhouse workers suggests that the bacteria can be transmitted through the air. Thus, it has potential for use in bioterrorism.

## How is brucellosis spread?

Brucellosis is most often spread by eating contaminated milk and dairy products, but is also spread when cuts on the skin's surface come into direct contact with infected animals. If the bacteria were used as a bioterrorist agent, it would likely be spread through the air. Brucellosis is not easily transmitted person to person.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of brucellosis include fever, headache, muscle aches, joint pain, back pain, sweats, chills, weakness, and general malaise. Many people also experience nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and constipation. In some cases cough and chest pain can occur.

## How long does it take for symptoms to appear?

Symptoms can take between 5 and 60 days to develop, and many people with naturally occurring infections have no symptoms. However, if a person were exposed large doses of the bacteria in the air, symptoms would be more likely to appear, and the length of time it would take for symptoms to appear could be shortened.

## How is it treated?

Although brucellosis has a low fatality rate even if untreated, symptoms can be prolonged and disabling. It is treatable with antibiotics. In Massachusetts, all cases of suspected brucellosis are required to be reported immediately to local health departments.

## Is there a vaccine against brucellosis?

There is currently no vaccine available for humans.

**For more information, please contact  
Boston Public Health Commission  
Communicable Disease Control  
(617) 534-5611 or [www.bphc.org](http://www.bphc.org)**