



PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

**Boston Public Health Commission
Communicable Disease Control Division
1010 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, MA 02118
Phone: 617-534-5611 Fax: 617-534-5905**

Q Fever

What is Q fever?

Q fever is a disease caused the bacteria *Coxiella burnetii*. It normally occurs in animals like sheep, cattle, and goats, but can be spread to humans who have contact with infected animals or their body fluids.

How is Q fever spread?

Q fever is spread through breathing in the bacteria shed by an infected animal. Person to person transmission is rare. However, because it can be grown in a laboratory and is highly infectious when dispersed into the air, it could be used for biological terrorism.

What are the symptoms of Q fever?

Symptoms of Q fever are similar to many other flu-like illnesses with fever, headaches, muscle aches, and fatigue. Pneumonia develops in about half of all patients, and some develop chest pain. About one third of patients develop acute hepatitis (inflammation of the liver).

How long does it take for symptoms to appear?

Only about one half of people infected with the bacteria develop any symptoms. For those that do develop symptoms, it usually takes between 2 days to 2 weeks for them to appear but can take as long as 40 days. The amount of time it takes for symptoms to appear depends on the number of bacteria breathed in. The larger the amount inhaled, the quicker symptoms appear and the longer the illness lasts.

How is Q fever treated?

Although most people with Q fever will eventually recover without treatment, when treated with antibiotics, symptoms begin to improve within 1 to 2 days. It is recommended that even suspect cases of Q fever be treated with antibiotics to reduce the risk of complications. In Massachusetts, all cases of suspected Q fever are required to be reported immediately to local health departments.

Is there a vaccine for Q fever?

There is no vaccine that has been tested and proven safe for use in the general population at this time.

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