



Brucellosis

What is brucellosis?

Brucellosis is an infection caused by a family of bacteria called *Brucellae*. It is commonly found in animals. In rare cases, it has been diagnosed in humans who have contact with infected animals. Human cases are often seen in slaughterhouse workers. This 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. It also spreads 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 from 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, but some people may not have any symptoms. However, if a person were exposed to large doses of the bacteria in the air, symptoms would be more likely to appear, and the onset would be quicker.

How is it treated?

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

How can I prevent brucellosis?

Do not eat undercooked meat or unpasteurized dairy products (such as milk, cheese or ice cream). Hunters, veterinarians and slaughterhouse workers should use protective gear (such as gowns, gloves and goggles) when handling animal tissues.

Is there a vaccine against brucellosis?

There is currently no vaccine available for humans.