

**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?

It is spread through breathing in the bacteria shed by an infected animal. Tick bites, eating unpasteurized milk or dairy products and person to person transmission are other possible modes of transmission. However, these modes are rare. Q fever poses a risk to be used for biological terrorism because it can be grown in a laboratory and is highly infectious when dispersed into the air.

What are the symptoms of Q fever?

Symptoms of Q fever are similar to many other flu-like illnesses. They may include:

- high fevers (up to 104-105°F)
- severe headache
- general malaise
- myalgia
- chills and/or sweats
- non-productive cough
- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- abdominal pain
- chest pain

Some people with Q fever infection may experience serious illness such as pneumonia, granulomatous hepatitis (inflammation of the liver), myocarditis (inflammation of the heart tissue) or central nervous system complications. Pregnant women who are infected may be at risk for pre-term delivery or miscarriage.

How long does it take for symptoms to appear?

About one half of people infected with the bacteria develop any symptoms. For those that do develop symptoms, it usually takes 2-3 weeks for them to appear. 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?

Most people with Q fever will recover without treatment. If treated with antibiotics within the first 3 days of the disease, fever will subside within 72 hours. 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 should be reported to local health departments.

Is there a vaccine for Q fever?

Yes. However, this vaccine is not commercially available in the United States. People who have previously been exposed to *C. burnetii* should not get the vaccine because severe reactions may occur.