



## FACT SHEET

### Q Fever

#### What is it?

- Q Fever is a disease caused by a type of bacteria named *Coxiella burnetii*
- Q fever is primarily a disease of cattle, sheep, and goats. Other livestock and pets can also get Q fever. Most animals have no symptoms; *C. burnetii* infection may cause abortion in sheep and goats.

#### Symptoms

- Only about 50% of all people infected with *C. burnetii* become ill, but the illness can be severe. Symptoms of acute Q fever cases may include:
  - High fever
  - Weakness
  - Dry cough
  - Confusion
  - Chills and sweats
  - Chest pain
  - Severe headache
  - Muscle ache
  - Vomiting
  - Diarrhea
  - Abdominal pain
- Fever usually lasts for 1 to 2 weeks and most cases recover within a couple of months without treatment. Weight loss and pneumonia are common
- Chronic Q fever is uncommon but much more serious and can affect the heart. It is more common in persons with heart disease, cancer, chronic kidney disease, or organ transplants.

#### How is it spread?

- Infection occurs by inhaling dust contaminated by dried placental material, birth fluids, as well as urine and feces from infected animals.
- The risk of infection is greatest close to the source of bacteria, but there have been cases of infection even several miles away.

- Accidentally inhaling contaminated milk is a less common way of infection.

#### Diagnosis and Treatment

- Q fever infection is diagnosed with blood tests or by finding the organism in tissues using DNA detection methods.
- Antibiotic treatment is most effective if started early in the course of the illness.
- Chronic Q fever infection of the heart is very difficult to treat. Treatment may take several years and sometimes requires surgery to remove the damaged heart valves.

#### Prevention

- Avoid exposure to infected animals, especially if you have heart-valve disease or vascular grafts.
- Precautions for persons who work with animals (i.e., veterinarians, meat processing plant workers, sheep and dairy workers, livestock farmers, and researchers at facilities housing sheep) include:
  - Appropriate disposal of placenta, other birth products and aborted fetuses of sheep and goats.
  - Restricted access to laboratories and barns with infected or at-risk animals.
  - Use of appropriate procedures for bagging and disinfecting work clothes.
- Consume only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- Q fever vaccine is not commercially available in the United States.

**Report all cases to El Paso Department of Public Health by calling 915-212-6520**