



## Salem/Cumberland County Health Department

# Q FEVER

(PUBLIC HANDOUT)

### **What is Q Fever?**

Q Fever is a disease caused by a group of bacteria is spread throughout the world.

### **What are the symptoms of Q Fever?**

Only about one half of all people infected with the bacteria that cause Q Fever show signs of the illness. Most cases begin with the sudden onset of one or more of the following:

- High fevers (up to 104-105 degrees)
- Severe headache
- General confusion
- Sore throat
- Chills
- Sweats
- Non-productive cough
- Nausea
- Vomiting diarrhea
- Abdominal pain
- Chest pain

Fever usually lasts 1-2 weeks. Weight loss can occur and



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persist for some time. Thirty to forty percent of patients with a symptomatic infection will develop pneumonia. Also, a majority of patients have abnormal results on liver function tests and some will develop hepatitis. In general, most patients will recover to good health within several months without any treatment. Only 1%-2% of people with Q Fever die of the disease.

### **How does Q Fever spread?**

Cattle, sheep, and goats are primary carriers of the bacteria that cause Q Fever. Infection has been noted in a wide variety of other animals, including other breeds of livestock and in domesticated pets. The bacteria are secreted in milk, urine, and feces of infected animals. The bacteria can spread through the air, contaminated food & beverages, tick bites, and from human-to-human.

Humans are often at higher risk to the disease, and very few organisms from the bacteria are required to cause infection.



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### **How is Q Fever treated?**

Q Fever can be treated with an antibiotic. Treatment is most effective when given within the first 3 days of illness.

### **What steps can people take to prevent Q Fever?**

In the United States, Q Fever outbreaks have resulted mainly from occupational exposure involving veterinarians, meat processing plant workers, sheep & dairy workers, livestock farmers, and researchers at places that house sheep.

The following measures should be used to prevent and control Q Fever:

- ✓ Appropriately dispose of placenta, birth products, fetal membranes, and aborted fetuses at facilities housing sheep and goats.
- ✓ Restrict access to barns and labs used in housing potentially infected animals.
- ✓ Use only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- ✓ Use appropriate procedures for bagging and washing of lab clothing.
- ✓ Vaccinate (where possible) people engaged in research with pregnant sheep or live samples of the bacteria that cause Q Fever.



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- ✓ Ensure that holding facilities for sheep should be located away from populated areas. Animals should be tested regularly for the bacteria that cause Q Fever, and measures should be implemented to prevent airflow to other occupied areas.

A vaccine for Q Fever has been developed and has successfully protected humans in Australia. However, this vaccine is not commercially available in the United States.