

European Animal Health Industry statement regarding Q-fever

Q-fever is a very contagious zoonotic disease which can infect humans, caused by the bacterial pathogen *Coxiella burnetii*. It is found across Europe, although recently there has been a particular rise in the Netherlands, where the government is taking measures to deal with the situation.

Many domesticated and wild animals including mammals, birds, reptiles and arthropods can carry the *C. burnetii* pathogen. In most cases, the infection is asymptomatic, but abortions or stillbirths can occur in ruminants. Both symptomatic and asymptomatic animals shed *C. burnetii* in large quantities. Shedding can also occur in faeces, milk and urine. These organisms persist in the environment for long periods and can be spread long distances by the wind.

Human outbreaks can result from the inhalation of organisms in aerosol form or contaminated dust. More often, sporadic cases occur in people who are occupationally exposed.

The main reservoirs among mammals are cattle, sheep and goats, and have been found across the world (except New Zealand).

Prevention in animals:

For the prevention of the disease in animals, vaccination is used in areas where infections are common. Generally as well, sanitary measures and good husbandry are used to ensure the afterbirth and birth fluids are removed and to clean and disinfect areas where animals have given birth to prevent the disease from spreading.

Q-fever and humans:

Whilst less than half the people infected become ill, and most infections are mild, the disease may be very serious and life threatening. Symptoms include high fever, headache, muscle pains, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, chest and stomach pains. Treatment may involve antibiotic therapy.

Most human infections are associated with cattle, sheep and goats, and often occur when the animal gives birth. Humans are usually infected by inhalation, but transmission may also occur by the ingestion of unpasteurised milk or other contaminated material. The highest risk for infection exists among veterinarians, laboratory workers, farmers and abattoir workers.

MORE INFORMATION:

For further information on human health issues related to Q-fever, please check out http://one-health.eu/ee/index.php/en/page/q_fever/eu_vet_week_2009.

For more information on what Q-fever is, please check the OIE site: <http://www.oie.int/eng/ressources/Q-FEVER-EN.pdf>