

Q fever

Q fever is caused by a micro-organism which can be carried by cattle, sheep and goats. The organism does not occur naturally in Victoria, but is often brought in by animals that come from interstate.

Q fever has flu-like symptoms

People with Q fever suffer fever, headaches, chills and muscle pains. The illness occasionally causes long term complications.

It is passed on to humans in different ways

Q fever is passed on to humans through:

- Contact with animal faeces or urine
- Breathing in dust from infected premises
- Contact with contaminated wool or hides, or during slaughtering.

Who is at risk?

People who work with cattle, sheep and goats are most at risk of catching Q fever. They include:

- Abattoir workers
- Meat inspectors
- Shearers
- Wool sorters
- Veterinarians
- Animal transporters.

There is a vaccine to prevent Q fever

There is a vaccine called Q-Vax, which gives a high level of protection against Q fever - but it must be given before a person becomes infected.

Employers at workplaces where there is a high risk of Q fever should arrange for everyone to be immunised with Q-Vax. This will prevent Q fever infection.

People must be tested before receiving Q-Vax

People must be tested to make sure they are not already immune to Q fever before they are vaccinated with Q-Vax. Otherwise, they can have a severe reaction to the vaccine.

Testing involves a skin test and a blood test. Results of the skin test are ready seven days later. If both tests are negative, and the person is not allergic to eggs and has not already been vaccinated, they can then be vaccinated with Q-Vax.

Where to get help

- Your local doctor
- Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit, Department of Health Victoria Tel. (03) 9096 0000
- Nurse on Call Tel. 1300 606 024 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- National Immunisation Infoline Tel. 1800 671 811

Things to remember

- People who work with cattle, sheep and goats are at risk of Q fever

- There is an effective vaccine
- You must be tested before you can receive the vaccine.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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