

## Q fever

Q fever is caused by a micro-organism that is mainly carried by cattle, sheep and goats. It can also be carried by kangaroos, camels, rodents, cats, dogs, birds and wallabies. The bacteria can survive many disinfectants and harsh conditions. It may remain in the environment for long periods of time, which means that dust, hay and other small particles may also carry the bacteria. 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 such as heart disease.

### It is passed on to humans in different ways

Q fever is passed on to humans through:

- Contact with animal faeces, urine or birth products.
- 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:

- Farmers, hobby farmers and shooters
- Abattoir workers, including visitors and tradesmen
- Meat inspectors
- Shearers
- Wool sorters
- Veterinarians and animal handlers
- Animal transporters
- People who handle linen soiled by animal products.

### 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. It is recommended that workers at risk of contracting Q fever be immunised before starting work. This vaccine is not suitable for children under 15 years of age.

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

## Immunisation and HALO

The immunisations you may need are decided by your health, age, lifestyle and occupation. Together, these factors are referred to as HALO.

HALO is defined as:

- **Health** – some health conditions or factors may make you more vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases. For example, premature birth, asthma, diabetes, heart, lung, spleen or kidney conditions, Down syndrome and HIV will mean you may benefit from additional or more frequent immunisations.
- **Age** – at different ages you need protection from different vaccine-preventable diseases. Australia's National Immunisation Program sets out recommended immunisations for babies, children, older people and other people at risk, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Most recommended vaccines are available at no cost to these groups.
- **Lifestyle** – lifestyle choices can have an impact on your immunisation needs. Travelling overseas to certain locations, planning a family, sexual activity, smoking, and playing contact sport that may expose you directly to someone else's blood, will mean you may benefit from additional or more frequent immunisations.
- **Occupation** – you are likely to require additional or more frequent immunisations if you work in an occupation that exposes you to vaccine-preventable diseases or puts you into contact with people who are more susceptible to problems from vaccine-preventable diseases such as babies or young children, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with chronic or acute health conditions. Workers in aged care, childcare, healthcare, emergency service or sewerage repair and maintenance need to discuss their immunisation needs with their doctor. Some employers help with the cost of relevant vaccinations for their employees.

## Where to get help

- Your local doctor
- Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit, Department of Health Victoria Tel. 1300 651 160
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- National Immunisation Infoline Tel. 1800 671 811
- The Australian Q Fever Register Help-Line Tel. 1300 733 837

## 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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