

## Q Fever in humans

People get infected by breathing in dust or air-borne droplets containing the bacterium *Coxiella burnetii* when having direct or indirect contact with infected sheep and goats.

After an infection with *Coxiella burnetii* 60 % of infected people are asymptomatic, however 40 % show clinical symptoms for Q fever such as:

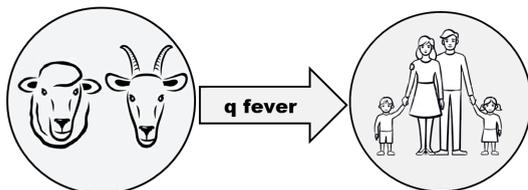
- Flu-like symptoms like e.g. severe retroorbital headache, high temperature, weariness, aching limbs, chills
- Pneumonia
- Inflammation of liver

If you believe you or your family members are suffering from any of the above symptoms, consult your general practitioner or the local health department. Q fever can be detected by means of a blood test.

When Q fever is detected the disease can be effectively targeted by antibiotics.

Testing for Q fever as well as early and targeted therapy in humans are important .

Protect your health and your family's health !



© VKA / Fotolia © VIGE.co / Fotolia

## Who can I turn to?

### Q-GAPS

Q-Fever GermAn Interdisciplinary Program for ReSearch

Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Anja Lührmann,  
Anja.Luehrmann@uk-erlangen.de

[www.qfever.info](http://www.qfever.info); [info@q-gaps.de](mailto:info@q-gaps.de)



### Q fever in sheep & goats

Please contact your national or local Office for Veterinary Affairs or the relevant reference laboratory.

### Q Fever in humans

Please contact your national or local health department or the relevant reference laboratory.

Issued by: University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, Foundation; Department of Biometry, Epidemiology and Information Processing; Clinic for Swine and Small Ruminants, Forensic Medicine and Ambulatory Service

As of: January 2026

This flyer was financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (project number 01KI1726A-G) as part of the National Network of Research of Zoonotic Infectious Diseases.

# Q-Fever

## A Risk for Humans and Animals



© Zummo/Fotolia

## Information on Q Fever in Humans & Small Ruminants



SPONSORED BY THE



Federal Ministry  
of Education  
and Research

# Q Fever

## What is it all about?

The bacterium *Coxiella burnetii* is a pathogen which causes a human and animal disease called Q fever or coxiellosis .

The pathogen can be transferred from animals to humans.

In most countries, humans mainly get infected by the pathogen during lambing season. Cattle and other species are less frequently the source of Q fever infections in humans.

## Q fever in sheep & goats

Sheep and goats can get infected with *Coxiella burnetii* by inhaling dust or droplets containing bacteria in the environment or get infected via other routes.

Infected small ruminants shed *Coxiella burnetii* in large quantities together with birth fluids and the afterbirth, especially when giving birth. In addition, there is shedding of bacteria via milk, urine and faeces.

Especially sheep can experience an infection with *Coxiella burnetii* without any clinical signs of disease. However, the following symptoms indicative of Q fever should be taken seriously in small ruminants:

- Abortion
- Stillbirths
- Delivery of weak offspring (lambs/ calves)
- Delayed expulsion of the afterbirth

## Q fever in my herd/flock - What to do if Q fever is suspected?

Should your sheep or goats show signs of Q fever, have your animals examined by your veterinarian.

The most meaningful test for verifying Q fever is the molecular biological analysis of afterbirth material, dead lambs/kids/calves, vaginal swabs or preputial swabs for detecting pathogen DNA.

Using this analysis, a current shedding of *Coxiella burnetii* can be detected .

Blood analysis of antibodies does not reliably detect an acute infection, however, shows a recent infection.

## What to do after a diagnosis?

In most countries, Q fever is a reportable animal disease. When Q fever is detected in your herd/flock spreading of infection to other animals and to humans should be prevented .

**Q fever is a risk for the health of humans  
and small ruminants**

**Take measures  
in both veterinary herd health  
management and hygiene!**

## Q Fever Control Measures:

- ✓ Make sure births and shearing occur in closed premises.
- ✓ Store afterbirth material in a closed container until they are disposed of by animal by-product operating plants).
- ✓ Disinfect your working clothes and working material.
- ✓ Inform your colleagues and family members about necessary protective and hygiene measures. Particular caution is required for pregnant women; their presence and activities should be avoided during Q fever incidents.
- ✓ Erect a sign near your stables:  
"Valuable livestock – Do Not Enter. – Authorized Personnel Only."
- ✓ Do not allow unauthorised persons access to the livestock.
- ✓ Do not offer raw milk or raw milk products to consumers and stand down from drinking raw milk and eating raw milk products. The process of pasteurisation results in inactivation of the pathogen.
- ✓ Store sheep and goat manure under foil for 9 months as well as away from the population, before manure is applied to fields.
- ✓ In some countries, a vaccine is available for ruminants, therefore protect your herd by vaccination against *Coxiella burnetii*.

**TIP** Further information as to Q fever:  
[www.qfever.info](http://www.qfever.info) or [info@q-gaps.de](mailto:info@q-gaps.de),

Flyer "Information for the General Public on Q Fever in Humans"