Q Fever, (Query Fever) General Information

Q Fever is an uncommon infection, It is caused by a type of organism (*Coxiella burnetti*) that is similar to a germ (*bacterial*) infection. Humans usually catch the disease from ticks, cattle, sheep, goats, and other farm animals. Although animals carry this infection, they do not get sick from it. The cause of infection (*Coxiella burnetti*) is found in the urine, feces, and milk of these animals. The amount of time it takes to get the disease following exposure varies from two to five weeks. The average time is twenty days. Usually this illness is self-limited. Most people get well in several weeks without treatment. If the infection lasts more than 6 months, it is considered long lasting *(chronic*). When the disease is long lasting, medications that kill germs *(antibiotics*) may be effective for treatment.

SYMPTOMS

- The most common symptom of Q fever is a flu-like illness. It often shows up as high grade fever, muscle aches, headaches, and fatigue (being tired out). Nonproductive cough and pneumonia are common.
- It may also show up as hepatitis. This is an *inflammation* (soreness) of the liver.
- *Pericarditis* (inflammation of the sac surrounding the heart) and *myocarditis* (inflammation of the muscle of the heart) are also common.
- Pregnant women getting the disease can develop fevers, *premature* (early) labor, and or spontaneous abortion. Spontaneous abortion means the pregnancy terminates by itself with loss of the fetus.

PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Avoid ticks. Ticks prefer to hide in shady, moist ground litter. Ticks can often be found above the ground clinging to tall grass, brush, shrubs, and low tree branches. They also live in lawns and gardens, especially at the edges of woodlands and around old stone walls. Natural vegetated areas cannot be considered free of infected ticks.

In tick-infested areas, the best precaution is to avoid contact with soil, leaf litter, and vegetation as much as possible. For those who enjoy gardening or walking in their yards, clearing brush and mowing tall grass around houses and at the edges of gardens may help reduce the tick population in the vicinity. Spring (late May) and Fall (September) applications of chemical insecticides (*acaricides*) by a licensed professional will also control ticks, especially in heavily infested areas. When working in the garden, pruning shrubs, or otherwise handling soil and vegetation, wear light-colored protective clothing and gloves. Spot-check frequently to prevent ticks from reaching the skin.

Ticks cannot jump or fly. They will not drop from an above-ground perch onto a passing animal. Potential hosts (e.g., humans) get ticks only by direct contact with them. Once a tick gains access to human skin, it generally climbs upward until it reaches a more protected area. This is often the back of the knee, groin, navel, armpit, ears, or nape of the neck. It then begins the slow process of embedding itself in the skin. This is when the human becomes infected.

Consume only pasteurized milk and milk products.

Women who are pregnant and people with cardiac valvular disease should avoid situations that are high risk for Q fever.

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