

# The responsibilities of abattoir owners in terms of the Animal Diseases Act (Act 35 of 1984)

## Abattoirs: Q-FEVER



## InfoPak

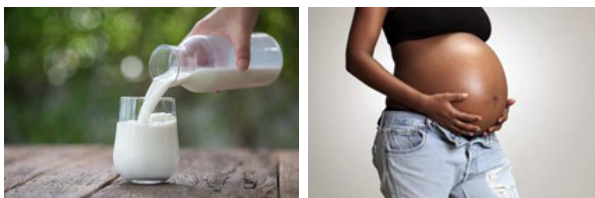
### What is Q fever?

- Q fever is caused by a bacteria called *Coxiella burnetti*.
- The bacteria infect various hosts, including humans and ruminants (cattle, sheep, and goats) predominantly.
- *Coxiella burnetti* does not usually cause clinical disease in these animals, although abortions in goats and sheep may occur.
- The placentas of affected animals may appear thickened and covered in exudate.



### Q-fever in humans

- Humans are very susceptible to disease. Humans can become infected by breathing in dust, or dried fomites or through direct skin contact with another infected person.
  - Direct exposure to a ruminant is not necessary for infection.



- Infection of humans usually occurs by inhalation of these organisms from the air that contains airborne barnyard dust contaminated by dried placental material, birth fluids and excreta of infected herd animals.
- Exposure to infected livestock at the time of birth (because the organism is activated during pregnancy) carries a high risk.
- Most importantly, during birthing the organisms are shed in high numbers within the amniotic fluids and the placenta.
- Infection can also be transmitted by raw milk and goat cheese. However, *C. burnetti* organisms are destroyed by pasteurization.
- High occupational risk for veterinary staff, stockyard workers, abattoir workers, farmers, shearers, and laboratory workers.
- Sixty percent of patients with Q fever are asymptomatic.
- The incubation period varies from 2-6 weeks.
- The illness starts as flu-like symptoms, including listlessness, sweating, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, and a dry cough. The fever lasts 1-2 weeks. Miscarriages can occur in pregnant women.
- Complications of Q fever may include atypical pneumonia, endocarditis, spontaneous abortion and premature labor, meningoencephalitis, and chronic fatigue.

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### Prevention

- A vaccine is available for humans, but it is only licensed for use in Australia.
- Wear protective clothing, including a mask (N95), gloves, barrier clothing and glasses when disposing of placenta, birth products, fetal membranes and aborted fetuses at facilities housing sheep and goats. Materials can be disposed of by burial.
- Use only pasteurized milk and milk products.
- When possible, people with a higher risk of developing severe consequences from infection (eg, people with cardiac valvular disease, immunosuppression, and pregnancy) should consider avoiding situations associated with a higher likelihood of exposure.
- Scrubbing with detergents and rinsing with copious amounts of water (when possible) after birth should be emphasised.
  - Care should be taken to prevent aerosolization through use of high-pressure washers or moving of bedding using leaf blowers and pressure washers, and personnel should use appropriate PPE during cleaning and disinfection.
  - Appropriate detergents for cleaning include quaternary ammonium, 70% ethanol, 1:100 dilution of hypochlorite.
  - Ensure at least 30 minutes contact time.



### Reference

Karama, M., 2022. Zoonoses and occupational health. s.l.:Section VPH, Department Paraclinical sciences, Faculty of veterinary science, University of Pretoria.

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