



Brucellosis

What is Brucellosis?

Brucellosis is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria *Brucella*.

How is it spread?

Brucella bacteria are passed among animals and cause disease in sheep, goats, cattle, deer, elk, pigs, dogs and several other animals.

Humans are infected in one of three ways:

- Eating or drinking something contaminated with *Brucella*.
- Breathing in the organism.
- Having the bacteria enter the body through skin wounds.

When sheep, goats, cows or camels are infected, their milk is contaminated. If the milk is not pasteurized, the bacteria can spread to the persons who drink the milk or eat cheeses made from it.

Getting the bacteria through inhalation is not common, but may be a hazard for those working in laboratories where the bacteria are cultured. Getting the bacteria through a skin wound is a risk for people who work in slaughterhouses or meat packing plants. Hunters are also at risk if cleaning a killed animal that is contaminated with the bacteria. Direct person-to-person spread of the bacteria is very rare.

What are the symptoms?

Brucellosis causes a range of flu-like symptoms, including fever, sweats, headaches, back pain and physical weakness. Severe infections of the central nervous system or lining of the heart may occur.

Long-lasting or chronic symptoms may also occur, including fevers, joint pain and fatigue.

How is it diagnosed?

Brucellosis is diagnosed by blood tests and cultures of blood, body fluid or tissues.

How is it treated?

Treatment depends on the site of the infection. Antibiotics are given for weeks or months. Surgery may be required to remove infected tissue.

How is it prevented?

People should not eat or drink unpasteurized milk, cheese or ice cream. If you are not sure whether or not the milk product is pasteurized, do not use it. Hunters and those working in the meat industry should use rubber gloves when handling animals. There is no vaccine for humans.

How does it affect my family or pets?

There are species of the *Brucella* bacteria that can infect cattle, goats, pigs and dogs. Pet owners are not considered to be at risk for infection. In animals, the bacteria cause spontaneous abortions. A veterinarian can treat animals.

For more information about brucellosis, contact the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 641-7777 or visit our website at www.guilfordhealth.org or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov