**Q fever**

Q fever is the world’s most prevalent zoonotic disease (a disease that is passed from animal to humans) and is caused by the bacterium Coxiella burnetti. Coxiella burnetti is able to survive in the environment for long periods and is resistant to heat, cold, drying and disinfectants. The organism is usually passed in infected animals during the birthing process, but can also be excreted through other bodily secretions. Dry, windy conditions can lead to the organism blowing around and people can inhale the organism. This bacterium is highly infectious and only 1 organism is required to cause an infection.

Symptoms people have with Q-fever include flu like symptoms, headaches and muscle aches, fever and sweating. 15-20% of sufferers progress to a chronic illness with chronic fatigue, muscle pain, depression and heart failure which can be fatal.

Fortunately in Australia we are the only country in the world with a registered human vaccination. It is important to protect yourself, your family and anyone working on your property. Currently in Australia there is no vaccine for animals in order to prevent Q fever. Australia has one of the highest notification rates of Q fever in the world with higher reports in QLD and generally less as you go further south.

Most infected goats are healthy carriers of the organism; some goats abort, have still births or deliver weak- infected kids. It is essential that people assisting with births must maintain strict personal hygiene with protective disposable overalls, gloves and regular hand washing. Once a diagnosis of abortion has occurred then all products of abortion need to be incinerated or buried and milk should be pasteurised.

A Victorian goat dairy farm had at least 24 people contract this serious disease, making it the most significant farm-based Q-fever outbreak ever documented in Australia. Throughout Australia there are hundreds of cases of Q fever in people each year so this is a very important issue that people dealing with livestock need to consider and need to protect themselves and people on their property.

In the Netherlands between the years 2007-2010 there were over 4000 people detected with Q fever. This outbreak emerged from a dormant endemic state to outbreak proportions and the outbreak was linked between humans and dairy goats. Scientists are not entirely sure why the outbreak suddenly occurred when the disease had been present for a long time in the Netherlands. It is thought that the increasing numbers of dairy goats in the area and even the potential shift to a more virulent strain may have occurred.

It is important to be aware of this disease and be proactive in getting yourself and your staff vaccinated. In 2015 in QLD a court prosecution of an employer of a worker who contracted Q fever has prompted a warning from Workplace Health and Safety QLD on the risk the disease poses. As the owner of goats it is worthwhile considering immunisation as the single most important way to protect non-immune workers from acquiring Q fever.

Please have a read of the NSW Health Fact Sheet on Q fever <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Factsheets/qfever>. PDF

Merry Christmas to you all and wishing you a wonderful 2017!

Contact your doctor to organise your Q fever vaccination.