

# Brucellosis

## Fact Sheet



Paul R. LePage, Governor

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**Report all suspect cases immediately by phone to 1-800-821-5821**

### What is brucellosis?

Brucellosis is a disease caused by *Brucella* bacteria. Brucellosis can affect humans and many types of animals, such as cattle, buffalo, bison, pigs, sheep, goats, elk, dogs, horses, and dolphins. Brucellosis is also known as undulant fever, Malta fever, and Mediterranean fever.

### What are the symptoms?

People with brucellosis may have fever, headache, weakness, sweats, chills, joint and muscle pain, fatigue, weight loss, and depression. Symptoms usually appear 1-2 months after exposure, but may appear any time between 5 days and several months after exposure. Brucellosis can also cause long-lasting joint pain, fatigue, and fevers that come and go.

### How is it spread?

Brucellosis is spread to humans by:

- 1) Eating or drinking contaminated unpasteurized milk and dairy products;
- 2) Breathing in the organism (especially in the laboratory or slaughterhouse setting);
- 3) Entering the body through skin wounds (direct contact with living or dead infected animals' placentas, aborted fetuses, secretions, tissues, blood, urine, and vaginal discharges).

Hunters may be infected through skin wounds or by accidentally swallowing or breathing in the bacteria after cleaning deer, elk, moose, or wild pigs that they have killed. Animals become infected through ingestion of contaminated discharges, food or water. Person-to-person transmission is rare. Infected mothers can transmit brucellosis to their infants through breastfeeding.

*Brucella* can be spread by breathing in the germs, and is considered to be a bioterrorism agent. Special handling is needed in a lab to work with these germs.

### How is it diagnosed?

Healthcare providers diagnose patients with brucellosis by symptoms and through laboratory tests. The state Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory can test for brucellosis in humans. Contact the Maine Department of Agriculture, State Veterinarian for information on testing of livestock.

### How is brucellosis treated?

Antibiotics can be used to treat brucellosis. Vaccine is available only for livestock. Dairy cows are vaccinated at approximately 2 months of age. National efforts are underway to eliminate brucellosis from animal herds.

### Where is brucellosis usually found?

Brucellosis is not common in the United States. Although brucellosis can be found worldwide, it is more common in countries that do not have effective public health and domestic animal health programs. High risk areas of the world include countries in the Mediterranean Basin, South and Central America, Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East.

### How can you prevent brucellosis?

Humans should not consume unpasteurized milk or products made with unpasteurized milk, such as cheese or ice cream. Hunters and others who handle animal carcasses should use rubber gloves when exposed to animal blood and secretions. Contaminated meat should be discarded. All meats should be cooked well. Laboratory workers should take special precautions to avoid exposure at work.

### Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> - is another excellent source of health information.