

Brucellosis

Fact Sheet

What is brucellosis?

Brucellosis is a disease caused by *Brucella* bacteria. It can affect humans and many types of animals, such as cattle, buffalo, bison, camels, pigs, sheep, goats, elk, dogs, horses, and dolphins.

What are the symptoms?

People with this infection may have fever, headache, weakness, sweats, chills, joint and muscle pain, fatigue, weight loss, and depression. It can cause long-lasting joint pain, fatigue, and fevers that come and go.

Symptoms usually appear 1-2 months after having contact with the bacteria. Symptoms may appear any time between 5 days and several months after.

How is it spread?

Brucellosis is spread to humans by:

- 1) Eating or drinking raw milk and raw dairy products from infected animals;
- 2) Breathing in the bacteria (especially in the lab or during animal slaughter);
- 3) Entering the body through skin wounds (direct contact with living or dead infected animals.)

Hunters may be infected through skin wounds or by accidentally swallowing or breathing in the bacteria when cleaning infected dead animals. Animals become infected through eating or drinking contaminated food or water.

Person-to-person spread is rare. Infected mothers can pass it to their infants in their breast milk.

These germs could be used as a weapon by terrorists and spread through the air.

How is it diagnosed?

Healthcare providers diagnose patients with this disease by symptoms and results of lab tests. Maine's Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory can test for this in humans. Contact the Maine Department of Agriculture, State Veterinarian for information on testing of livestock.

How is it treated?

Antibiotics can be used to treat the infection. Vaccine is available only for livestock. National efforts are underway to rid animal herds of these bacteria.

Where is it usually found?

It is not common in the United States, though it can be found worldwide.

How can you prevent it?

Humans should not drink raw milk or eat products made with raw milk, such as cheese or ice cream.

Hunters and others who handle animal carcasses should use rubber gloves when exposed to animal blood and fluids.

Meat from infected animals should be thrown away. All meats should be cooked well.

Special handling is needed in a lab to work with these germs.

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.