



Brucellosis: factsheet for veterinary exposure

Introduction

Brucellosis is an infection that humans can get from animals (a zoonosis). It is rare in the UK, and cases are almost always acquired abroad.

Brucellosis can be acquired through various ways:

- eating or drinking unpasteurised dairy products contaminated with brucellosis (most common)
- breathing in *Brucella* organisms in a laboratory or in a slaughterhouse
- contact with infected animals leading to bacteria entering through the skin or mucous membranes

The risk of getting brucellosis from an infected animal is low for most types of contact. Direct contact during animal birth, including contact with body fluids and products of conception is associated with a higher risk.

I have been in contact with an animal infected with *Brucella*, is there a risk that I will get brucellosis?

If you have not had contact with the animal during delivery or birth, then the risk for other types of contact is low. Exposure to blood or saliva also constitutes a low risk.

If it is possible that a high risk veterinary exposure has occurred, this will be individually risk assessed by the Brucella Reference Unit.

In the unlikely event that you develop any of the signs or symptoms of brucellosis (see below), then you should contact your GP for clinical advice and ensure that s/he is aware that you may have been exposed to brucellosis.

What are the signs and symptoms of brucellosis in humans?

Brucellosis may be asymptomatic, and the infection may persist for several months without you knowing. In some people, symptoms will develop suddenly. In others, symptoms may develop gradually and be persistent or recurrent, lasting for years.

Typical symptoms include:

- fever

- loss of appetite and weight loss
- sweating
- headaches
- fatigue
- back and joint pain

These symptoms tend to be prolonged and can make you feel very ill, but most people will eventually make a full recovery after treatment.

Brucellosis is rarely fatal in humans, although some cases can lead to life-threatening complications such as endocarditis and meningitis—particularly if left untreated.

Person-to-person spread of brucellosis is extremely rare.

Further information

NHS choices - <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/brucellosis/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

GOV.UK - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/brucellosis>

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