

Precautions about Q-fever (coxiellosis) Cornell Sheep Flock

This document will be supplied to and should be read and understood by anyone working with sheep in the Department of Animal Science flock. Q-fever is caused by *Coxiella burnetii*. As for most sheep flocks, in the past a small percentage of tested sheep in the Cornell flock are positive for this organism. The test shows that they have antibodies as a result of exposure so they may harbor the organism or they could have mounted a successful immune response to eliminate the organism. Although sheep do not often show symptoms, Q-fever can sometimes be a serious disease in humans. Therefore, the following precautions should be followed:

- Q-fever can cause abortions. Pregnant women or those who may become pregnant soon should avoid working with sheep.
- People with impaired immune systems should avoid working with sheep.
- People with heart valve abnormalities should avoid working with sheep.
- The organism is found in large concentrations in placental fluids of infected sheep and may also be found in sheep milk and sheep urine.
 - Wear disposable gloves when assisting lambing or handling newborn lambs or placentas.
 - Students should wear disposable aprons to minimize contamination of street clothes.
 - Disposable paper masks are available for protection in dusty conditions.
- Until hands are washed thoroughly, avoid touching other parts of your body (face, hair) after completion of tasks that require contact with sheep or contact with any part of the facilities in contact with sheep. Wash hands frequently.
- Do not drink unpasteurized sheep milk.
- Clean footwear when leaving the facilities where you.
- Become familiar with the symptoms of Q-fever and seek medical help if you have symptoms:
 - Acute fever, headache, weakness, fatigue
 - Pneumonia, hepatitis, heart valve infection
- Do not eat or drink in areas where sheep have contaminated the environment.
- Clothes can harbor the Q-fever organism. Launder work clothes frequently.
- Additional information about Q-fever can be found at the following web sites:
 - http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/q_fever.pdf
 - <http://www.research.cornell.edu/care/documents/OHS/Q%20fever.pdf>
- Additional Cornell resources:
 - Environmental Health & Safety: 607-255-8200, <http://www.ehs.cornell.edu/>
 - Occupational Medicine at Gannett: 607-255-6960, <http://www.gannett.cornell.edu/>
 - Center for Animal Resources and Education: 607-253-4378, <http://www.research.cornell.edu/care/>