

The Bare Facts

Q Fever

- Q fever is a flu-like disease, causing illness that can range from mild to very severe. It can sometimes last for years.
- People usually get Q fever from animals such as goats, cattle and sheep.
- People who work with or near animals are most at risk of getting Q fever.
- Everyone at risk should have a test to see if they are protected from the disease

Protection

- You are probably protected from Q fever if
 - You have had a vaccination
 - You have had a test which says you are protected
 - You have had the disease in the past (you may not know this if it was a mild case)

Q Fever and the Workplace

- Your employers will want to and need to make sure you are protected from Q fever.
- If you change jobs, your new employer will want to make sure you are protected from the disease before you start work.
- If you don't have proof of vaccination, you will need to be tested. The test is expensive and takes over a week to get the results, which means you shouldn't start work straight away.

The Register

- The Register was set up to help workers and employers prevent Q fever and make it easier when starting a new job.
- The Australian Q Fever Register has been established to store details about vaccinations, test results and disease
- If you are on the Register, employers can quickly check your immune status, and you can start work straight away without any testing.
- If you are not on the Register you may need to be re-tested when you change jobs.
- No one can see or use the information on the Register without your permission.

Want to know more?

This fact sheet contains answers to common questions about

- Q fever, and
- The Australian Q Fever Register

If you need more information, contact details for the Register are on the last page.

The Disease

What is Q Fever?

Q fever is a disease that can be spread to humans mainly from cattle, sheep and goats. The germ is spread in the urine, faeces and milk, but birth fluids, the foetus and the placenta are the most dangerous sources. When infected fluids dry out, the germ can remain alive in the dust for years.

People can become infected by being splashed with infected fluids, or by breathing in infected dust.

When infected some people experience no signs, while others just feel a little 'off colour' for a few days. Most people, however, feel like they have a bad case of the 'flu, with fever and sweating, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea for 7 to 10 days. For most people, these signs pass and there are no more problems. If you already have heart problems, you may get infection of the heart valves and severe illness as a result.

It is very rare for anybody to die of Q fever, although some people may get other problems months or years after the first signs of disease have passed. These take the form of extreme tiredness and weakness, even after minor exercise, muscle pains, headaches, fever, and depression. This form of the disease, Post Q Fever Fatigue Syndrome, often lasts for years, and may make work, and many other aspects of normal life, impossible.

While the early disease can be very unpleasant, preventing this disease is the main aim of Q fever vaccination.

Are you immune to Q Fever?

You are probably immune to Q fever and should not get the disease if you have ever had:

- a vaccination against Q fever,
- a test to say that you are immune, or
- the Q fever disease diagnosed by a doctor and confirmed by a blood test requested by a doctor.

If you don't know if you have had the disease, or a vaccination against it then your employer will ask you to have a test to check if you are immune. If you aren't immune then you will probably need to have a vaccination to protect you from Q fever in the future.

The Register

What is the Q Fever Register?

The Australian Q Fever Register is a database to store information about the Q fever immune status of people who have agreed to be part of the Register.

What is the Register for?

The purpose of the Register is to help people working in high risk industries avoid getting the disease. It does this by allowing employers to quickly find out if you are immune or not. If you are not immune, you can be vaccinated before you are exposed to the risk of infection.

How will the Register help?

If you have been vaccinated but have lost your details, or forgotten if you've been vaccinated, you will normally need to be re-tested to check if you are protected from the disease before you start work. Screening tests for Q fever are expensive and take one week.

The Register will help workers by storing their vaccination or test details and by making it easier if you change employers in the future. If you agree to be on the Register your details can be checked immediately, so that, if you are immune, you can start work immediately without any danger.

If you are not on the Register you will need to be tested, and then, if you are not already immune, your employer will arrange for you to be vaccinated.

What are the benefits of being on the Register?

If you are on the Register, it means that you can be safely employed in a new job (in a position where employees may be exposed to Q fever) much more easily and quickly. It saves the time, inconvenience and cost of unnecessary testing. It can also help you avoid the risks of unpleasant reactions that may occur when a person who is already immune is unnecessarily vaccinated.

Whose information is on the Register?

The Register is designed to store information on anybody who is at risk of being exposed to Q fever and who has agreed to be part of the Register.

Anybody who is tested or vaccinated, or people who contract the disease, can be entered on the Register, regardless of their occupation.

Who can access the information?

The Register has very strict privacy controls. After being added to the Register you can access the information on your own immune status using a secure password system. If you give your permission, the information may also be accessed by:

- your current employer,
- A new employer, when you apply for a new job, or
- your doctor.

How can employers or doctors access the information?

The information is stored in a secure computer database connected to the Internet. Employers and doctors who have registered as users can access the Register using a Web page. To get into the Register, they must use a password. The Register uses the same sort of security system as used in Internet banking. Any information they send or receive from the Register is coded to make sure it is kept private.

They can only get your information if they know your Q Fever Register Number (a unique number for each person on the Register). The only way they can get that number is if you tell them.

How is information put into the Register?

Information is entered into the Register by registered users (employers or doctors) or their designated staff (eg an Occupational Health and Safety Nurse). Before any information about you is entered, you must read, understand and sign a Q Fever Personal Information and Consent Form. This form contains basic information to identify you, and shows that you have agreed to be entered on the Register.

If you don't want to be entered on the Register, you don't have to complete the form.

What information is kept?

There are two types of information on the Register: information which identifies you, and information about your immune status.

The identification information is:

- your gender (male or female), your first name, middle names and surname
- your date of birth
- your current address, and
- a secret question and answer. This is a question that only you are likely to know the answer to, and helps Register staff confirm your identity if you ever need to make telephone inquiries.

The immune status information is:

- Date of any vaccination you have had
- Date of any screening test you have had, the test type and your test result
- Date of any tests to confirm a diagnosis of Q fever you have had.

Does anybody else have access to this information?

The Register may, from time to time, receive requests to use the information for research into Q fever. Any requests will be considered by the Q Fever Technical Management Committee (made up of industry, union, occupation health and safety and medical representatives) and an appropriate Ethics committee. If the request is approved, the researcher may be given access to the information. Normally, no identifying information (name or address) will be released. However, if you have previously indicated that you are willing to be contacted for research purposes, the researcher may be given your name and address details.

Your personal information will not be released or sold for any commercial or marketing purpose. No information will be released to any government authorities except in the following circumstances:

- where a government authority acts as a registered screening and vaccination service provider, or
- where there are reasonable grounds to believe that disclosure is necessary to prevent a threat to life or health.

How can the information be used?

Your own information can only be used by you, or (with your permission) your employer or doctor to find out your Q fever immune status.

A summary of the information in the Register will be made available for statistical and surveillance purposes, but contains no information that allows individuals to be identified. This summary may contain, for example, the number of people diagnosed with Q fever, the number vaccinated, the percent of positive test results and so on.

The information may be used for research purposes from time to time, but only under the controls described above.

What is the Q Fever Card?

When your details are entered into the Register or new information is added, a Q Fever Register Card will be mailed to you. This card contains your name, your current Q fever immune status, and your Q Fever Register Number. This card should be kept and used to prove your immune status in the future.

What can you do if you forget your Q Fever Register Number?

You may be asked by your employers or doctors for your Q Fever Register Number. They will need your number to be able to check the Register to see if you are immune to Q fever. Everybody on the Register is issued with a unique Q Fever Register Number which is printed on their Q Fever Card.

If you lose the card, or need the Register Number and don't have the card with you, telephone the Q Fever Register Help-Line (1300 QFEVER [1300 733837]). Register staff will ask you to identify yourself by asking your name, date of birth, and your secret question. Once identified, they will tell you your Q Fever Register Number.

How can you find out what information is kept on you?

Everybody on the Register has the right to know what information is kept, and to request that any errors be corrected. Whenever a Q Fever Card is issued, a covering letter with the full details of the information held by the Register is sent with it. This letter contains a form for correction of any incorrect details, which should be sent back to the Register.

You can also call the Q Fever Register Help-Line (1300 QFEVER) identify yourself, and request your details or correct errors.

What if you lose your Q Fever Card?

If you lose your Q Fever Card, you can telephone the Register and ask for a new card to be issued. The Card is not required for an employer or doctor to access the information in the Register – they just need to know your Q Fever Register Number. You can get this immediately by telephoning the Register Help-Line.

What about discrimination?

In addition to the protection offered by State and Commonwealth legislation, registered users of the Register (employers in particular) must sign an agreement stating that they will not discriminate against a person in any way, either on the basis of the information contained on the Register, because a person is not on the Register, or because a person fails to inform them of their Register Number.

Who owns the Register and the data?

The Register and data in it are owned by Meat and Livestock Australia Limited (MLA). It is operated by an independent Data Manager appointed by MLA, currently AusVet Animal Health Services Pty Ltd.

How can you contact the Register?

Anybody can contact the Register on the Australian Q Fever Register Help-Line, or by fax or mail.

Australian Q Fever Register Help-Line: **1300 QFEVER** (1300 733 837)
Postal Address: Australian Q Fever Register
PO Box 3180
South Brisbane QLD 4101
Fax number: 07 3844 8374

Where can you get more information about Q Fever and the Register?

More information about Q fever, and about the Register is available on the Internet at the Australian Q Fever Register Web site:

<http://www.qfever.org>