



# Brucellosis Backgrounder

Brucellosis is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria of the genus *Brucella*. Various *Brucella* species affect sheep, goats, cattle, deer, elk, pigs, dogs and other animals. Humans become infected by coming in contact with animals or animal products that are contaminated with these bacteria. In humans, brucellosis can cause a range of symptoms that are similar to the flu and may include fever, sweats, headaches, back pains and physical weakness. Severe infections of the central nervous system or lining of the heart may occur. Brucellosis can also cause long-lasting or chronic symptoms that include recurrent fevers, joint pain, and fatigue.

Alternative names for brucellosis are: Rock fever, Cyprus fever, Undulant fever, Gibraltar fever, and Malta fever.

Although brucellosis can be found worldwide, it is more common in countries that do not have standardized and effective public health and domestic animal health programs. Areas currently listed as high risk are the Mediterranean Basin (Portugal, Spain, Southern France, Italy, Greece, Turkey, North Africa), South and Central America, Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. The bacteria that cause brucellosis are found in unpasteurized milk and dairy products from diseased cows, sheep, and goats. It can also be transmitted to humans from animals through infected tissue, urine, blood, vaginal discharges, aborted fetuses, and especially placentas. Unpasteurized cheeses, sometimes called "village cheeses", from these areas may represent a particular risk for tourists.

Direct person-to-person spread of brucellosis is extremely rare. Mothers who are breast-feeding may transmit the infection to their infants. Sexual transmission has also been reported.

Brucellosis is rare in humans in the United States. Most cases are among recent immigrants, people who have ingested food products imported from abroad, or in people who have traveled to countries where brucellosis is common. Occasionally there are cases reported in veterinarians, butchers, rendering plant workers, meat inspectors and farmers.