

# Your Health and Animals

A quick guide for those  
working in the meat industry

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## **Introduction**

If your job involves handling animals and certain parts of animals particularly during the slaughter and dressing stages, there are illnesses that you could contract. Illnesses that can be contracted from animals are collectively known as zoonoses. The risks are usually low; however it is important to know what these are and the precautions that should be followed.

Because such infections from animals can result in symptoms which can be very similar to common illnesses, your doctor may mistake them for another illness. If you are feeling ill and your symptoms are similar to any of the illnesses highlighted in this booklet, please ensure that you pass the booklet to your doctor and explain your work with animals.

## **Zoonoses,**

*(illnesses that can be contracted from animals) that may present a hazard to abattoir staff include:*

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## Gut pathogens

*(E.g. Campylobacter, Clostridium Perfringens, Escherichia coli O:157, Salmonella, Cryptosporidium).*

**Incidence:** Commonly present in animal gut although human illness is more often through contaminated food rather than occupational.

**Hazard to humans:** Usual food poisoning symptoms of vomiting, diarrhoea, etc. but more serious with the O157 strain of E. Coli sometimes causes kidney failure.

**Activities:** Tasks involving possibly contact with gut content including droving, flaying, hoof removal, evisceration and handling green offal.

**Precautionary measures:** Good personal hygiene particularly before eating, drinking and smoking. PPE to prevent cuts, waterproof dressings and wearing of gloves.

## **Anthrax**

**Sources:** Cattle, goats, sheep, horses and pigs.

**Incidence:** Rare.

**Hazard to humans:** Cutaneous and pulmonary.

**Activities:** Handling infected animals and/or products.

**Precautionary measures:**

- Personal Protective Equipment, (PPE), to prevent cuts: Chain mail gloves and leggings or legging. Cut resistant glove on knife hand and pair on two handed jobs.
- Waterproof dressings.
- Good personal hygiene.
- Ensure sudden deaths in cattle are investigated.

## **Bovine Tuberculosis**

**Sources:** Cattle.

**Incidence:** Relatively common in slaughterhouses that handle reactor cattle in the South and West of the country. Occasionally found in pigs and deer.

**Hazard to humans:** Chronic progressive disease with fever and weight loss.

**Activities:** Handling cattle with open TB and tuberculous pus found at post mortem inspection.

**Precautionary measures:** There is only significant risk with cattle that have reacted to testing. These cattle are slaughtered in batches usually at the end of production. PPE to protect from cuts must be used. Good personal hygiene. Obviously swollen lymph nodes must not be incised. Waterproof dressings and gloves. Staff will be advised when these cattle are processed and masks, (EN 149 FFP3 standard) will be issued for

certain tasks. People are advised to consult their GP about BCG inoculation which may or may not be required dependent on age, exposure profile or other risk factors.

## Brucellosis

**Sources:** Cattle.

**Incidence: Rare.** There have been no cases in the UK in cattle since 2009.

**Hazard to humans:** Malaise, chills, sweats, fatigue and weakness. Can be lifelong infection, and can be fatal.

**Activities:** Handling cattle and aborted foetuses.

**Precautionary measures:** There is only significant risk with cattle that have reacted to testing. These cattle are slaughtered in batches usually at the end of production. PPE to protect from cuts must be used, good personal hygiene, waterproof dressings and gloves. Staff will be advised when these cattle are processed and masks, (EN 149 FFP3 standard) will be issued for certain tasks.



## **BSE/vCJD**

**Sources:** Cattle.

**Incidence:** Now very low incidence in cattle: 4 cases in the UK detected by active surveillance in the UK in the first 7 months of 2011. The incidence of vCJD in people has also fallen and has averaged 2.33 per year from 2008-10, from a high of 28 per year in 2000. There has never been a case associated with working in an abattoir.

**Hazard to humans:** Although there is not conclusive evidence that BSE does actually cause vCJD in humans the transmissible agent involved has been shown to be the same for both conditions. The advisory committee on dangerous pathogens has categorised BSE as Hazard group 3.

**Activities:** Tasks where there is risk of ingestion of contaminated tissues. Stunning, splitting carcasses, spinal cord removal and brain sampling.

**Precautionary measures:** Good personal hygiene, PPE to prevent cuts, gloves, waterproof dressings and eye and mouth protection on the higher risk tasks. This can either be a mask and goggles or a face visor.

## Cryptosporidiosis

**Sources:** Mammals and birds.

**Incidence:** Quite common accounts for about 9% of cases of diarrhoea.

**Hazard to humans:** Not usually serious unless immune system is weak, e.g. conditions such as AIDS.

**Activities:** Handling young animals particularly calves.

**Precautionary measures:** Good personal hygiene, PPE to prevent cuts, gloves and waterproof dressings.

## **Enzootic abortion** ***(Chlamydia abortus)***

**Sources:** Pregnant sheep usually, cattle and goats possible.

**Incidence:** Not known as difficult to identify causative strain in man. Causes up to 50% of ewe abortions.

**Hazard to humans:** Illness resulting in abortion, occasionally death.

**Activities:** Handling/contact with pregnant ewes, particularly placenta.

**Precautionary measures:** Pregnant women including visitors should be excluded from contact with sheep during breeding season which varies around the country, but loosely autumn to late spring.

## Leptospirosis: Weil's Disease

**Sources:** Rat urine.

**Incidence:** Human 50 cases per year.

**Hazard to humans:** Fever, haemorrhages, meningitis, pneumonia and kidney failure.

Fatal in 20% of cases.

**Activities:** Although occupations such as farming and sewage treatment are more commonly affected abattoir workers can be exposed if rats are present particularly in lairage and effluent areas.

**Precautionary measures:** Do not handle dead or live rats. Good personal hygiene, gloves, water proof suits in risk areas and waterproof dressings.

## Leptospirosis and cattle

**Sources:** Cattle urine.

**Incidence:** About 50 cases per year.

**Hazard to humans:** Flu like illness with head aches may last several weeks.

Occasionally more serious with meningitis.

**Activities:** Mainly dairy herdsmen but slaughtermen could be at risk.

**Precautionary measures:** Good personal hygiene, PPE to prevent cuts, gloves and waterproof dressings.

## ORF

**Sources:** Sheep and goats  
(lesions on lips and mouth).

**Incidence:** Approximately 50 cases per year

**Hazard to humans:** Painful, ulcerative  
skin lesions.

**Activities:** Contact with infected animals,  
pelts and wool.

**Precautionary measures:** PPE to prevent  
cuts, gloves and waterproof dressings.

## Q Fever

**Sources:** Sheep and cattle.

**Incidence:** Around 150 cases per year have been reported in England and Wales in animals but is underreported due to mild symptoms.

**Hazard to humans:** Usually mild illness, occasionally more serious causing pneumonia, liver and heart damage. Occasionally fatal.

**Activities:** Contact with infected animals, faeces particularly placenta.

**Precautionary measures:** Good personal hygiene, gloves, PPE to prevent cuts and waterproof dressings. Employees should be aware that the greatest risk to a foetus is during the first three months of pregnancy. Although the risk to the foetus from Q fever is small, it is important for women considering pregnancy, or who are, or could be in the early stages of pregnancy to consider this risk.



They should also report their condition as soon as known to their employer, and be excluded from duties in the livestock and slaughter process.

## Ringworm

**Sources:** Cattle although other mammals are infective.

**Incidence:** Most often seen in young cattle.

**Hazard to humans:** Round white crusty lesions. Itchy. Flaky.

**Activities:** Handling infected animals.

**Precautionary measures:** Good personal hygiene, gloves, PPE to prevent cuts and waterproof dressings.

## Streptococcus suis

**Sources:** Pigs.

**Incidence:** One or two cases in humans each year.

**Hazard to humans:** Often sub clinical but may be severe with meningitis and septicaemia.

**Activities:** Boning pork with lacerations on hands.

**Precautionary measures:** Good personal hygiene, gloves, PPE to prevent cuts, waterproof dressings and disinfection of equipment.



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