



Q Fever and the Australian Q Fever Register

The Bare Facts

Q Fever

- Q fever is an infectious disease that can cause severe illness in some people.
- People usually get Q fever from farm animals (cattle, sheep and goats). Other animals may also be infected including wildlife and even dogs and cats.
- People who work with or near animals are most at risk of getting Q fever, and particularly people working at animal processing plants or working with animals around birthing time.
- 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 been vaccinated with the Q Fever vaccine
 - You have been previously infected with Q Fever

Q Fever and the Workplace

- Your employers will want to make sure you are protected from Q fever before you start work.
- People working in high risk areas should be tested and vaccinated if appropriate to ensure protection against Q Fever in the workplace.

Testing and vaccination

- People at risk of Q Fever should consider vaccination. Before vaccination, people must have skin and blood tests to check if they have been previously exposed to Q Fever. Testing requires two visits to a health provider about one week apart. People who test positive are immune and don't receive the vaccine. People who test negative can be safely vaccinated.
- Immunity to Q Fever typically develops about 15 days after vaccination. If you have been vaccinated and you work in a high risk environment, you should not commence work until after this time. If you test positive and do not need the vaccine you are protected and can start work once your results are confirmed – usually once your record is entered onto the Q Fever Register.

The Q Fever 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 stores 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. For more information visit the Q Fever Register website (www.qfever.org) or speak to your doctor.

The Disease

What is Q Fever?

Q fever 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. People can become infected by contacting, ingesting or breathing in infected material.

When infected some people experience no signs, while others just feel a little 'off colour' for a few days. Many people may feel like they have a bad case of the 'flu, with fever and sweating, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea for several days. For most people, these signs pass and there are no more problems. More severe disease may occur in people with other conditions such as pre-existing heart conditions.

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, may last for years and may be debilitating.

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 avoid getting the disease. It does this by providing a secure record of your Q Fever immune status so both you and your employer can be confident that you are immune.

How will the Register help?

The Register will help workers by storing their vaccination or test details and by making it easier for you and your employer to document your Q Fever status at any time.

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

What are the benefits of being on the Register?

Once on the Register, you or your employer can check your Q fever status at any time and you will be issued with a Q fever card that you can carry with you as a record of your Q fever status. 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 for those people who test positive for Q fever or who have tested negative and have then been vaccinated for Q fever.

Who can access the information?

The Register has strict privacy controls. After being added to the Register you can access the information on your own immune status by calling the Register. If you give your permission, the information may also be accessed by an employer or your doctor.

How can employers or doctors access the information?

Register information is stored in a database connected to the Internet. Employers and doctors who have registered as users can access the Register using a Web page. The Register uses commercial security systems to protect information in the same way that other services do such as internet banking.

Users can only access your Q fever status 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?

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,
- where there are reasonable grounds to believe that disclosure is necessary to prevent a threat to life or health, or
- where required or authorised by or under law.

The Register may receive requests to use the information for research into Q fever. Any requests will be considered by the Q Fever Technical Management Committee 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.

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 is used for general reporting, 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.

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.

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 and will arrange to print a replacement card if required.

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.

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.

CONTACT DETAILS

Australian Q Fever Register Help-Line: **1300 QFEVER** (1300 733 837)
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Web site: **<http://www.qfever.org>**