

## Q Fever

(From *Goat Health Care*, p. 156)

Q Fever is an infection caused by the bacterium *Coxiella burnetii*. Most goats with the infection do not show any signs, but can still pass it through manure, urine or birthing fluids. Humans can also get the disease from breathing contaminated barnyard dust, from drinking contaminated milk or from tick bites. Shedding of bacteria in the milk can occur for up to 52 days after birth. People with pre-existing heart valve disease or with valve replacements are cautioned to be extra careful around goats.

Q Fever is a worldwide disease, and outbreaks have been reported in Greece, the US, Canada, Australia and other countries. An estimated 20% of goats in Ontario, Canada and 26% in California have antibodies to *C. burnetii*. Goats are now considered the most common source of human infection.

The disease usually comes to light during kidding season, when it is spread to humans, or causes multiple abortions among goats in a herd. Abortions have been shown to occur 25–48 days after infection. Kids that do survive usually die within 24 hours. *C. burnetii* is found in the mammary glands, lymph nodes above the mammary glands, placenta and uterus. It may be shed during birth and lactation. A 2003 study showed that the life of the infection is limited to two kidding seasons.

Diagnosis is by laboratory testing of the placenta. In the case of an abortion in a goat herd, the placenta should be refrigerated in the event that other goats abort and a cause needs to be determined.

Tetracycline is considered the drug of choice, and chloramphenicol is also effective. Pregnant animals should be segregated and placentas and dead kids should be burned or buried to help reduce spread of the disease. When purchasing new goats, inquire about whether the breeder has had any problem with abortion in the herd over the past several years.