

Fact Sheet

Brucellosis

What is brucellosis?

Brucellosis is a disease caused by bacteria. These bacteria are mainly passed between animals, including caribou and marine mammals. The number of caribou with brucellosis is different between herds and can change over time.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can start several weeks or months after being exposed to the bacteria. In humans, brucellosis can cause a range of symptoms and can at first seem like a common illness like the flu. Symptoms may include fever, chills, sweating, headaches, back pains, feeling weak, and not wanting to eat. People with brucellosis may also have swollen glands and pain in their joints. Brucellosis can cause long-lasting symptoms that include: fevers, joint pain, and feeling tired.

How does a person get it?

- People can get brucellosis from touching the bacteria when handling or cutting up an infected animal. The bacteria can infect people through cuts on their skin or through their eyes, nose and mouth.
- People can also become infected if they eat raw, frozen, dried, or undercooked meat or bone marrow from a caribou with brucellosis. Brucellosis is not normally passed from person to person.
- Drinking or eating dairy products (such as milk or cheese) that have the brucellosis bacteria in them.
- Breathing in the bacteria.
- Although brucellosis is not commonly spread from person to person, mothers who are breastfeeding may spread the infection to their babies.

What is the treatment for it?

Usually, brucellosis can be treated with medicine. If you think that you have been exposed to a caribou with brucellosis and you experience flu-like symptoms, you should contact your community health centre.

How can it be prevented?

- There is no vaccine for humans.
- Do not eat or drink unpasteurized milk, cheese, or ice cream at home or when traveling. Pasteurized means the milk or milk product has been heated to kill the harmful bacteria and cooled before it is sold in stores.
- Hunters should use rubber gloves when handling guts of animals.
- Look for signs of an infected caribou: swollen joints, limping or lameness, swollen glands or pus-filled swelling under the skin, swollen testicles, swollen womb, abortion or early birth of weak or dead calves.
- When cutting up a caribou, even one that looks healthy, hunters should:
 - wear gloves that can be thrown away.
 - wash all knives and other tools in warm soapy water after cutting up each caribou.
 - wash your hands well with soap and hot water after handling the animal(s).
 - do not cut or touch any parts of the carcass that look diseased.
 - do not eat meat from a caribou that you think may be infected with brucellosis unless you cook the meat well.
 - do not feed any parts from an infected caribou to dogs unless the meat is cooked well.