

Goat and Sheep Cull: Combating Spread of Q Fever Outbreak in Humans

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Sheep

Drastic measures are underway in the Netherlands in order to prevent the spread of Q fever to humans. Thousands of goats and sheep at infected farms in the country will soon be slaughtered.

In June, the Netherlands National Institute for Public Health and the Environment reported an outbreak of Q fever, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC). The disease has spread to one-third of the country. More than 2,200 people in the Netherlands have contracted the disease so far this year. In 2007, less than 200 cases were reported.

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Goats

While other animals carry the *Coxiella burnetii* bacteria, cattle, sheep and goats are the primary carriers of the infectious zoonotic disease. It is estimated between 15,000 and 20,000 goats and sheep will be slaughtered in the cull.

The government has taken numerous preventative measures, including vaccination programs for farms with more than 50 sheep or goats, transport restrictions and various hygiene measures. Vaccinated animals will be tested and those contaminated, will be killed. All pregnant or infected goats and sheep that have not been vaccinated at infected farms will also be killed, whether or not they have the disease. Depending on the results of the vaccination program and testing, the cull may be expanded.

Q Fever

[Q fever](#) is usually contracted by breathing in contaminated droplets from infected animals. The disease spreads particularly fast when infected animals give birth, which generally occurs between February and May. Because *C. burnetii* is resistant to heat, common disinfectants and drying, the bacteria can survive for long periods of time.

While Q fever in humans can be treated with antibiotics, the disease may cause premature births or miscarriages in pregnant women and in rare cases, can cause death. People with weakened immune systems or heart valve issues are at greatest risk. So far this year, six people in the Netherlands have died.

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