Q Fever

Agent: *Coxiella burnetii* (bacteria)
Mode of Transmission: Inhalation of air contaminated with dried placental material, birth fluids, or excreta of infected animals; direct exposure to infected animals or tissues; exposure to contaminated material, such as wool, straw, fertilizer, or laundry.
Signs/Symptoms: Acute infections are characterized by high fever, severe headache, malaise, muscle aches, confusion, non-productive cough, nausea, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and/or chest pain. Patients may have abnormal results on liver function tests and some develop hepatitis. In chronic Q fever, infection persists for more than six months and the most serious complication is endocarditis. As many as 65% of persons with chronic Q fever may die of the illness.
Prevention: Preventive measures include appropriate disposal of potentially infectious tissues and proper hygiene when handling animal birth material.
Other Important Information: Cattle, sheep and goats are the main natural reservoirs for *C. burnetii*. This bacterium is classified by the CDC as a potential bioterrorism agent because it could easily be disseminated and result in a moderate amount of illness.

One case of Q fever was reported in Virginia in 2009, which is less than the five-year average of 2.4 cases per year. The illness occurred in an adult male from the northwest region. No potential source of exposure was identified.