

Brucellosis

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Brucellosis is a highly contagious infectious disease in domestic livestock and many species of wildlife caused by bacteria of the genus *Brucella*. Most types of *Brucella* causing illness in man are associated with livestock; with *B. melitenis* in sheep, *B. abortus* in cattle and *B. suis* in swine, although dogs infected with *B. canis* have caused some cases in humans. Infection usually occurs after contact with tissues, blood, urine, vaginal discharges, aborted fetuses and placentas through breaks in the skin. However, sporadic cases have occurred among consumers of unpasteurized dairy products and raw meat.¹ The clinical manifestations of human brucellosis are quite variable. The incubation period can be less than a week to more than 2 months, and the onset can be insidious or abrupt. In acute cases the predominant symptoms are pyrexia, profuse sweats, chills, weakness, malaise, body ache, joint pains, weight loss and anorexia, whereas a chronic form of the illness includes recurrent bouts of fever, depression, malaise, headaches, sweating, vague pains, inertia and insomnia.² Also subclinical or latent infections can be found in apparently healthy individuals whose occupation requires frequent contact with infected livestock.

Human brucellosis has been documented in Florida since 1928, with the highest number of cases (505) reported during the decade of the 1940s.³ Implementation of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Brucellosis Eradication Program was credited with a dramatic decline in cases during the 1950s (112) and 1960s (43). There was a resurgence of human cases in the 1970s (68) and 1980s (84) due mainly from exposure to cattle from counties not yet certified as free from infection by the USDA, wild hogs and domestic swine purchased for custom slaughter by private individuals. An epidemiologic analysis of 72 human cases reported in Florida from 1961-75 showed that cases of brucellosis were male (82%), white (76%) and between 25 and 44 years of age (60%).³ Also of 61 cases reported from 1963-75, 27 had occupations related to the livestock industry and of these, most (59%) were infected by cattle or strain 19 vaccine. Of 10 cases related to the meat processing industry, the probable source of infection was evenly divided between cattle and swine. The remaining 24 cases studied included housewives, students/children and hunters and most (63%) of these were infected by swine.

Currently, brucellosis is categorized as a notifiable disease of infrequent occurrence in Florida with an average of seven cases per year reported since 1990.

References

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