CONDITION

Cyprus fever

Cyprus fever is an older name for brucellosis, a bacterial infection usually caught from infected animals or unpasteurized dairy.

WHAT IT IS
Bacterial infection passed mainly from animals or unpasteurized dairy

BODY SYSTEM
Whole body, especially joints, liver, heart, and nervous system

MAIN SYMPTOMS
Fever, heavy sweating, fatigue, joint or muscle pain

WHAT CAUSES IT
Infection with Brucella bacteria

HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED
Blood cultures and Brucella antibody tests

MAIN TREATMENT
Combination antibiotic treatment for several weeks

CAN IT BE CURED?
Yes - antibiotics usually clear the infection

IS IT AN EMERGENCY?
Sometimes - confusion, seizures, chest pain, or breathing trouble

LONG-TERM OUTLOOK
Most recover; relapse or lasting symptoms can occur

Overview

Cyprus fever is an older name for brucellosis . It is an infection caused by bacteria called Brucella . The name reflects its historical association with the Mediterranean region. It does not mean the infection occurs only in Cyprus.

Brucellosis mainly spreads from infected animals to people. Sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, dogs, and camels can carry different types of Brucella . People are most often exposed through unpasteurized milk or dairy products, or through direct contact with an infected animal's blood, placenta, birth fluids, or tissues.

The infection can affect many parts of the body. Early symptoms may look like flu or another common infection, making it difficult to recognize without asking about food, travel, work, and animal exposure.

Antibiotics like amoxicillin or doxycycline can usually cure brucellosis. Treatment matters because untreated infection can persist, return after seeming to improve, or occasionally cause serious problems involving the bones, heart, or nervous system.

Symptoms

Symptoms can begin about one week to several months after exposure. Many people become unwell within a few weeks.

Common symptoms include:

The fever may rise and fall over time. This pattern led to another historical name, "undulant fever."

Some people develop symptoms linked to a particular part of the body. Back or hip pain can occur if the spine or nearby joints are affected. Abdominal discomfort may be related to swelling of the liver or spleen. Less often, the infection can affect the testicles, heart, brain, or tissues around the brain.

Symptoms alone cannot confirm Cyprus fever. Many other infections and inflammatory conditions cause similar problems.

- Fever that may come and go
- Heavy sweating, especially at night
- Tiredness or weakness
- Headache
- Reduced appetite or weight loss
- Pain in the muscles, joints, or back
- Chills or a general flu-like feeling

Causes and risk factors

Cyprus fever is caused by Brucella bacteria. The bacteria enter the body through the mouth, broken skin, the eyes, or the lungs.

The most common risks are:

Pasteurization is controlled heating that kills harmful germs. Products described as "raw" or "unpasteurized" have not received this treatment. Soft cheeses and other homemade dairy products may be a source if their milk was not pasteurized.

Person-to-person spread is very rare. Uncommon reports have involved pregnancy and birth, breastfeeding, sexual contact, blood transfusion, or tissue transplantation. Everyday contact, such as touching, sharing a room, or eating together, is not a usual route of infection.

Your risk is based on exposure, not ancestry. Having family roots in Cyprus or elsewhere in the Mediterranean does not itself cause the condition.

- Drinking unpasteurized milk or eating dairy products made from it
- Handling infected animals, placentas, aborted animal fetuses, or birth fluids
- Working with livestock in farming, veterinary, slaughterhouse, or meat-processing settings
- Breathing in bacteria in a laboratory or other high-risk workplace
- Visiting or living in an area where brucellosis in livestock is not well controlled

Diagnosis

A healthcare professional will ask about your symptoms and possible exposures. Important details include recent travel, raw dairy products, contact with farm animals, and work involving animal tissues or laboratory cultures.

Diagnosis usually involves:

A culture provides strong evidence of infection, but the bacteria can grow slowly. More than one sample may be needed. Antibody results must be interpreted alongside symptoms and exposure history because antibodies can remain after an earlier infection. Repeat testing may show whether antibody levels are changing.

Cultures from bone marrow, joint fluid, or another affected tissue may sometimes be used. Molecular tests such as PCR, which look for bacterial genetic material, are available in some specialist laboratories.

Other tests may check the blood count, liver, heart, bones, or nervous system. Scans may be needed if symptoms suggest infection in a specific area.

Tell the healthcare professional about any possible animal or laboratory exposure. This information helps the testing laboratory use the correct methods and safety precautions.

- Blood cultures , which try to grow Brucella bacteria from a blood sample
- Antibody tests , also called serology, which look for the immune system's response to Brucella

Treatment and management

Brucellosis is treated with a combination of antibiotics. Using more than one antibiotic reduces the risk that the infection will persist or return. Treatment commonly lasts several weeks and may be longer when the bones, heart, brain, or other organs are involved.

The exact treatment plan is based on factors such as:

Some complicated infections require hospital care, intravenous antibiotics, or a procedure to treat damaged or infected tissue. Heart-valve infection may need assessment by specialist heart and infection teams.

It is important to complete the agreed course, even if fever and pain improve earlier. Missing treatment or stopping too soon can increase the chance of relapse. If side effects make treatment difficult, contact the prescribing service rather than changing or stopping antibiotics on your own.

Follow-up may include a review of symptoms, examination, and blood tests. New or returning fever, sweats, or focused pain should be assessed because relapse can occur after treatment.

Rest, enough fluids, and a gradual return to activity can support recovery. Pain relief may help muscle or joint discomfort, but it does not replace antibiotic treatment.

- Your age
- Pregnancy or breastfeeding
- The type and location of infection
- Other health conditions
- Previous treatment or relapse

Complications

Most people recover with appropriate treatment. Complications are more likely when diagnosis or treatment is delayed, although they can occasionally occur despite care.

Possible complications include:

Heart-valve infection is uncommon but is one of the most serious complications.
Nervous-system infection can cause severe headache, neck stiffness, confusion, weakness, or seizures.

Some people continue to have fatigue, pain, sleep problems, or difficulty concentrating after the active infection has been treated. These symptoms need assessment because they do not

always mean that live bacteria remain in the body.

- Infection or inflammation of the joints, spine, or nearby tissues
- Persistent liver or spleen inflammation
- Infection of a testicle and the tube behind it
- Infection involving the brain, nerves, or tissues around the brain
- Infection of a heart valve, called endocarditis

Prevention

Brucellosis can often be prevented by limiting contact with the bacteria. There is no vaccine for people.

Avoid drinking raw milk or eating dairy products unless you know they were made from pasteurized milk. This includes products bought directly from farms, roadside sellers, or markets while travelling. Pasteurized goat, sheep, cow, and camel milk products are safer choices.

Cook meat thoroughly. Use protective clothing, gloves, and eye protection if your work involves animal births, placentas, aborted fetuses, blood, or tissues. Cover cuts and wash exposed skin after handling animals.

People working in laboratories, veterinary settings, farms, and slaughterhouses should follow their workplace's infection-control procedures. An accidental laboratory or occupational exposure should be reported promptly because time-sensitive assessment may be needed.

Controlling infection in livestock through testing, animal vaccination programs, and food-safety systems also reduces human infection.

Living with it and what to expect

Fever may improve after treatment begins, but tiredness, reduced stamina, and muscle or joint pain can take longer to settle. Recovery may take weeks or months, especially after a prolonged infection or a complication involving the bones or nervous system.

A gradual return to work, school, exercise, and household tasks may be easier than trying to resume everything at once. If back or joint infection has occurred, rehabilitation or physiotherapy may be part of recovery.

Relapse means that active infection returns after improvement. It is most likely to happen

within the months after treatment, but timing is not the same for everyone. Returning fever, night sweats, weight loss, or focused pain should be reviewed rather than assumed to be part of normal recovery.

Long-lasting fatigue or pain does not automatically mean that more antibiotics are needed. Further assessment can look for relapse, an untreated complication, treatment effects, or another cause.

Brucellosis does not usually spread through ordinary household contact. Most people can remain around family and friends unless their healthcare team identifies a rare situation requiring specific precautions.

When to get medical help

Arrange a medical appointment soon if you develop an unexplained fever, sweats, fatigue, or joint pain after:

Also seek review if symptoms return after treatment, or if fatigue and pain are not gradually improving. During treatment, report significant side effects or difficulty taking the antibiotics as directed.

Contact a healthcare service urgently for a severe headache, stiff neck, new weakness, persistent vomiting, a swollen and painful testicle, or severe new back pain. These symptoms can have several causes but may need prompt assessment.

Seek emergency care for:

Pregnant people with a possible exposure or symptoms should seek prompt medical advice because the infection and antibiotic choices need careful assessment.

- Drinking unpasteurized milk or eating dairy made from it
- Handling livestock, animal birth materials, or aborted animal tissue
- Working with Brucella in a laboratory
- Travelling in an area where brucellosis occurs
- Confusion, collapse, or difficulty waking
- A seizure
- Chest pain, severe breathlessness, or fainting
- Sudden weakness, loss of movement, or difficulty speaking
- Rapidly worsening illness with signs of shock, such as cold clammy skin

Common questions

Is Cyprus fever the same as brucellosis?

Yes. Cyprus fever is a historical name for brucellosis. "Brucellosis" is the modern medical term. Malta fever, Mediterranean fever, and undulant fever are other older names.

Why is it called Cyprus fever?

The name came from the condition's historical recognition around Cyprus and the wider Mediterranean region. Brucellosis now occurs in many parts of the world, especially where livestock infection or unpasteurized dairy remains common.

Can I catch Cyprus fever from another person?

Ordinary person-to-person spread is extremely unusual. You do not normally catch it through coughing, touching, sharing food, or living in the same home. Most infections come from animals, animal tissues, or unpasteurized dairy.

How long does Cyprus fever last?

The active infection requires several weeks of antibiotic treatment, and complicated cases may need longer. Fever may settle before tiredness and aches do. Some people need months to regain their usual energy, while others recover sooner.

Can Cyprus fever come back after treatment?

Yes, relapse is possible. The risk is higher if treatment is incomplete or infection is present in a difficult-to-treat area, such as bone or a heart valve. Returning fever, sweats, weight loss, or focused pain should be assessed.

Is pasteurized goat or sheep milk safe?

Pasteurization kills Brucella when it is carried out correctly. Milk, cheese, and other dairy products clearly labelled as pasteurized are safer than raw products. The animal species does not remove the risk if the milk is unpasteurized.

Sources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Clinical Overview of Brucellosis
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About Brucellosis
- World Health Organization. Brucellosis
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Facts about Brucellosis



- NHS. Brucellosis