Brucellosis is a very contagious disease in animals and is caused by bacteria (germs).

Cattle usually get the disease from contaminated feed or water or after licking infected material (afterbirth, calf or the cow itself). Most of these animals remain carriers of the disease for the rest of their lives.

What are the symptoms of brucellosis in cattle?

Cows with brucellosis usually loose their unborn calves (abort) at about 7 months of pregnancy. Calves which are born, are very weak and usually die shortly after birth.

Infection of the udder results in a severe drop in milk production in an infected herd. Cows may also develop large swellings on their knees (hygromas) as a result of brucellosis.

Bulls with brucellosis are usually sterile.
It affects people too!

* Brucellosis is a serious disease in cattle and sheep. People can also get the disease.

* The disease can be controlled in animals. People who have brucellosis can be treated.

* People can get brucellosis from drinking unpasteurised milk.

* Symptoms in cattle and humans are often vague and may resemble many other diseases.

How do people get brucellosis?

* People get brucellosis by drinking unpasteurised milk from infected cows.

* The bacteria are also present in large numbers in the aborted foetus and membranes of cows with brucellosis. Protective clothing (gloves) should therefore be worn when handling this material.

* The bacteria may be present in the air and dust of contaminated stables.

* People who accidentally prick themselves with the needle while vaccinating cattle with the brucellosis (strain 19) vaccine, can get the disease.

* One can also get brucellosis by means of a blood transfusion.
What are the signs of brucellosis?

A person usually becomes ill 1 to 2 weeks after contact with the bacteria. At first you may think you have flu. The signs are:

* nausea
* pains in the muscles and joints
* persistent coughing and cold sweat, especially at night
* depression
* jaundice
* bleeding (the skin and mucous membranes)
* weakness and tiredness.

Complications may develop if the disease is not diagnosed and treated early.

Consult a doctor or go to a clinic if you think that you may have this disease.

How can brucellosis be prevented?

**In people**

* Drink only pasteurised milk. Pasteurised milk has been heated in a special way to kill all the harmful bacteria.
* Always wear protective clothing when handling material which may be infected.

**In cattle**

* Heifers can be vaccinated against the disease at the age of 4 to 8 months.
Cattle are tested for the presence of the disease. Positive animals are slaughtered to prevent the spread of infection among the rest of the herd.