

Workplace Learning and Q fever:

Information for schools and external providers

Key messages:

- Q fever is a bacterial infection spread mainly from infected cattle, sheep and goats. It is often air-borne in dust and aerosols from infected animals. It causes a severe flu-like illness and sometimes leads to chronic infection.
- Students and staff are potentially at risk when participating in livestock-related agricultural activities while on workplace learning.
- If teachers, students or parent/carers have any concerns they should seek advice from their local health authority or health practitioner.
- Q fever is not a widespread illness and can be controlled by undertaking a Q fever screening and vaccination if required, and by following the procedures as set out by NSW Health.
- There are no mandatory requirements except in relation to **meat processing plants**. The Australian Meat Industry Council can be contacted on telephone (02) 9086 2200 for the information package to support school student workplace learning in meat processing plants or refer to <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/vetinschools/worklearn/meat.html>.
- Where students plan to undertake workplace learning in environments with livestock they **must** be provided with information on Q fever and instructed and trained in the steps to reduce the risk of infection. This information must be provided as early as possible before workplace learning to enable students and their parents/carers to seek further advice and to take account of any screening and vaccination timeframes, should they choose this option. See section 3 below.

1. Key Information about Q fever includes the dot points above and the following:

- **NSW Health Q fever fact sheet**

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/q-fever.aspx>

- **Q fever register and information**

<https://www.qfever.org/>

2. Higher risk activities that should be avoided by non-immune staff and students

The activities to be avoided include those that expose the student, or staff making supervisory visits, to dust and aerosols, e.g.

- observing or assisting with animal birthing
- handling birth products
- handling an animal's carcass
- generating dust and aerosols when cleaning up birth products and animal excreta e.g. dry sweeping, using a high pressure hose.

3. **Schools providing workplace learning activities that involve experiences in an agricultural environment must provide students with the [NSW Health Q fever Factsheet](#) and discuss this with the students. In addition, the following information must be emphasised during work ready programs/lessons that prepare students for work experience or VET work placement.**

Following these procedures should reduce the risk of Q fever infection:

- washing the hands and arms thoroughly in soapy water or using a hand sanitiser after any contact with animals
- wearing appropriate PPE when washing animal urine, faeces, blood and other body fluids from the work site and equipment, and disinfecting equipment and surfaces where practicable
- removing clothing that may carry the bacteria before returning to the home environment
- wearing a mask when mowing lawns or gardening in areas where there are livestock or native animals
- drinking water taps should be in a suitable area located away from animals
- not eating or drinking while in an area that animals are housed or penned, and not putting their fingers in the mouth, because of the risk of infection
- taking meal-breaks and eating snacks well away from areas where animals are kept
- not consuming unpasteurised produce, for example milk or cheese.

4. **For further information, follow the Department's Health and Safety Directorate's links below:**

Student Safety

<https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/workhealthandsafety/risk-management-student-services/student-safety>

Infection Control

<https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/directoratesaz/workhealthandsafety/swl/proc/infectioncontrolprocedures.pdf>

Contact with animals

<https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/directoratesaz/workhealthandsafety/swl/fact/contactwithanimalsoverview.pdf>

5. **If you have any queries**, please contact the Student Pathways Advisor in Senior Pathways in Secondary Education on telephone 9244 5425.