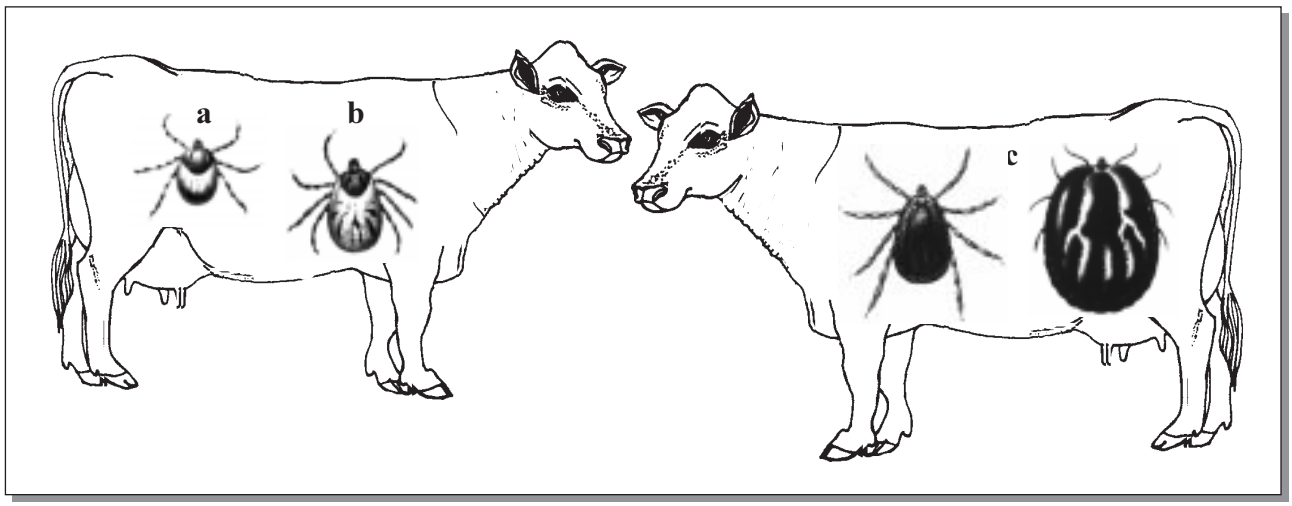
CONGO FEVER

Congo fever is transmitted by the *Hyalomma* (bontlegged) tick. The Congo fever virus is widespread in Africa, Europe and Asia where this tick occurs. The disease was first diagnosed in South Africa in 1981 in a child who was bitten by a tick.

How do animals, ostriches and birds get infected with Congo fever?

- Congo fever is a tick-borne viral disease of humans, animals, ostriches and other birds. The bontlegged tick is the most important carrier of this virus. The Congo fever virus causes no apparent illness in animals, except for a mild fever as a result of the virus circulating in the animal (viraemia) for a very short period.

Life cycle of the bontlegged tick



The larvae (a), nymph (b) and adult ticks (c) with the male on the left and the female on the right

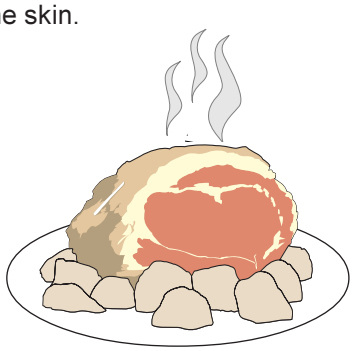
How is the disease transmitted to humans?

- Congo fever is transmissible to humans through contact with infected blood, other tissue or a tick bite. People handling livestock or ostriches during routine procedures, such as castration, the inserting of eartags, vaccinations or slaughtering of animals, are at risk.
- People can also get infected through the handling of ticks.

Symptoms of Congo fever in humans

- Humans usually show symptoms within 9 days after a tick bite or contact with infected blood. They get a flu-like illness and blood spots appear under the skin. More severe bleeding and liver disease often follow. About 30 % of people contracting Congo fever may die. Because this is a viral disease, antibiotics are not an effective method of treatment.

- The symptoms of Congo fever should not be confused with those of tick-bite fever where a characteristic lesion often develops in the area of the tick bite.
- There are also other diseases which may cause fever and bleeding under the skin. Diagnosis, therefore, is a specialised task undertaken by laboratories.



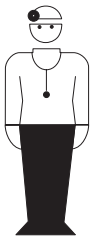
Is meat safe for human consumption?

- There is no evidence that the Congo fever virus may be transmitted to humans in meat processed and matured according to health regulations. This virus does not survive in meat which is cooked or matured (low pH) or in dried blood.

How can people at risk be protected against the disease?

- Many human infections result direct from tick bites:
  * Animals should be treated with acaricides (which protect against tick bites) to reduce the number of ticks.
  * Clothing can be treated with acaricides.

- People coming into contact with fresh blood are at risk:
  * Protective clothing should be worn to avoid exposure of skin to fresh blood and other tissue.
- Meat processed and matured according to health regulations is not regarded as a risk.
  * Only buy meat from animals slaughtered at an approved abattoir.



Consult your medical doctor if any suspected symptoms are noticed

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