

Fact sheet

Leptospirosis

What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that can infect both humans and animals. It is shed in the urine or tissues of infected animals or humans and may survive in water or moist soil for weeks to months.

How is leptospirosis spread?

Many different kinds of animals, including cattle, pigs, horses, dogs, rodents, and wild animals carry the bacteria. Some become sick and others have no symptoms. A person can be infected when their skin, eyes, mouth, or nose come in contact with urine or tissues from infected animals. Most commonly, humans can get leptospirosis through contact with soil or water contaminated by infected animal urine.

What are the signs and symptoms of leptospirosis?

Early symptoms include high fever, muscle pains in the calves and lower back, and headache around the eyes and forehead. Vomiting, diarrhea, yellowing of the skin and eyes, swelling of the eyes, and skin rashes may also develop.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of leptospirosis can develop anywhere from 2 days to 4 weeks after being exposed to the bacteria.

Who is most at risk?

Anyone who has contact with infected animals or soil/water where the bacteria are present may be at risk. Those who work outdoors or with animals, such as farmers, mine workers, veterinarians, or military personnel are some who may have a higher risk. People involved in outdoor freshwater activities like swimming, rafting, or kayaking may also be at risk.

What type of health problems are caused by leptospirosis?

Without treatment, leptospirosis can lead to kidney damage, inflammation of the membrane around the brain and spinal cord, liver failure, difficulty breathing, and even death.

How is leptospirosis diagnosed?

Leptospirosis is usually diagnosed by testing a blood sample.

How is leptospirosis treated?

Leptospirosis is treated with antibiotics, such as doxycycline or penicillin, which should be given early in the course of the disease. Intravenous (IV) antibiotics may be required for persons with more severe symptoms.

How can leptospirosis be prevented?

Avoid contact with potentially infected animals and contaminated water and soil.

- Do not swim or wade in water that might be contaminated with animal urine.
- People exposed to potentially infected animals, water, or soil should wear protective clothing, boots, and gloves.
- Do not feed wildlife or attract them to homes or yards.
- Rodent-proof homes and out-buildings.
- Vaccinate pets against leptospirosis.
- Dispose of dead animals properly.
- Drain potentially contaminated waters and soil when possible.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Your [local health department](#)
- [Utah Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)