

Leptospirosis

FACTSHEET

Weil Disease/Canicola Fever/ Mud Fever/Swineherd Disease/Hemorrhagic Jaundice

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What is Leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that affects humans and animals. It can cause a wide range of symptoms, and some infected persons may have no symptoms at all.

Who gets Leptospirosis?

Individuals at risk for contracting Leptospirosis are those who may be exposed to contaminated water such as campers, swimmers, rafters, and hunters. Those who work as farmers, slaughterhouse employees, military troops and sewer workers are also at risk.

What are the symptoms of Leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis can cause a wide range of symptoms that may include fever, headache, chills, vomiting, and muscle aches. Other symptoms of more severe disease include jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), anemia, and sometimes a rash. Persons with this infection may have very mild or no symptoms and others might be quite ill and require hospitalization.

How is Leptospirosis spread?

Leptospirosis is spread to humans exposure to water, moist soil, or vegetation contaminated by the urine of an infected animal, by swimming or in water contaminated by the urine of an infected animal, direct contact with the urine of an infected animal, occasionally through ingestion of food contaminated with urine of infected rats, and occasionally by breathing in the sprays of contaminated fluids. There is no person-to-person spread of the disease.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The time between a person's exposure to a contaminated source and becoming sick is two to four weeks.

Is a person with Leptospirosis contagious?

No, there is no person-to-person spread of leptospirosis.

How is Leptospirosis treated?

There are several antibiotics that can be prescribed for the treatment of leptospirosis. They should be given as soon as possible. Depending on the severity of the illness, they may be given orally or by intravenous infusion (IV).

How can Leptospirosis be prevented?

The risk of acquiring leptospirosis can be greatly reduced by not swimming or wading in water that might be contaminated with animal urine. Protective clothing or footwear should be worn by those exposed to contaminated water or soil because of their job or recreational activities. Rodent and mice should be eliminated from areas where people live or work.

Want more information?

Information about leptospirosis and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call 202-442-9371.

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