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What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is an infectious disease that affects humans and animals. It is caused by bacteria called *Leptospira*. Leptospirosis is a disease that has the potential to cause very severe illness in humans.

Who gets leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is most commonly found in warm and humid climates. Each year, about 100–150 cases of human illness are reported in the United States. People involved in activities that put them in contact with water, soil or animals, may be at increased risk for infection. Examples of these activities include water recreation like swimming and kayaking, outdoor activities like hiking and gardening, and working in a veterinary hospital or wildlife rehabilitation center.

How is leptospirosis spread?

This bacterium is spread through direct contact with the urine or other bodily fluids of animals. Many different kinds of wild and domestic animals including rodents, dogs, cattle, pigs, horses, raccoons and opossums can carry this bacterium. The bacteria can survive in contaminated water or soil for weeks to months.

Exposure to *Leptospira* can occur if a person has indirect contact with urine or bodily fluids of an infected animal.

What are the symptoms of leptospirosis?

People exposed to the *Leptospira* bacteria may not show any symptoms. When symptoms occur, illness can range from mild to severe.

Mild symptoms include fever, chills, headache, body aches, muscle pain, vomiting and fatigue. Some people may have more severe illness that can involve the liver, kidneys, and/or the nervous system (meningitis). Infection with leptospirosis during pregnancy can lead to abortion or fetal death.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The incubation time (exposure to *Leptospira* until symptoms begin) is 2–30 days, with a range of 5–14 days being most common.

How is leptospirosis diagnosed?

Leptospirosis is often diagnosed through testing on blood samples and possibly urine samples.

What is the treatment for leptospirosis?

A doctor may prescribe specific antibiotics to treat leptospirosis. Treatment early in the disease is important to decrease the severity of symptoms and how long they last.

Should people who have been in contact with leptospirosis need to be tested and treated?

Leptospirosis does not typically spread from human to human, so there is very little risk of contracting the disease from another person.

How can leptospirosis be prevented?

Ways to lower your risk of getting leptospirosis include:

- Asking your veterinarian about vaccination for your animals against *Leptospira*.
- Not swimming or wading in water that might be contaminated with animal urine, especially after hurricanes, floods, or heavy rainfall.
- Wearing protective clothing or footwear near potentially contaminated soil or water.
- Covering your cuts or scratches with waterproof bandages.
- Controlling rodents (rats and mice), especially in areas where food is stored.

Is there a vaccine available to protect against leptospirosis?

Currently, there is no vaccine available for humans in the United States. Consult with your veterinarian regarding vaccination for leptospirosis in animals.

How can I get more information about leptospirosis?

- If you have concerns about leptospirosis, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. You can find your local health department at vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/.
- Visit the CDC page on leptospirosis at cdc.gov/leptospirosis/about/index.html for more information.

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