



FACT SHEET

Leptospirosis

What is it?

Leptospirosis is a disease caused by bacteria called *Leptospira* that infect humans and animals. Leptospirosis occurs worldwide but is more common in temperate and tropical areas of the world. Some people infected with leptospirosis will have no symptoms at all, and some people will become severely ill. Some wild and domestic animals, such as cattle, pigs, dogs, raccoons and rodents, carry the *Leptospira* bacteria and pass them in their urine. Not animals become sick when they are infected with *Leptospira* bacteria.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually develop between 7 and 14 days (range 2 to 30 days) after coming into contact with *Leptospira* bacteria. The illness lasts from a few days to several weeks. Most people will have mild disease.

- Initial symptoms can include:
 - Fever, which may start suddenly
 - Severe headache
 - Pain in legs and back
 - Vomiting and diarrhea.
- In some people, the illness improves briefly before they develop more severe illness. Signs of severe illness include:
 - Anemia (low number of red blood cells)
 - Liver and kidney failure (Weil's disease)
 - Meningitis (swelling of the lining of the brain)
 - Mental confusion and depression

How is it spread?

- People get infected when water contaminated with the urine of infected animals gets on their skin or in their nose, mouth, throat or eyes. People can also get infected by drinking contaminated water or eating contaminated food.
- Examples of ways people can get exposed include:

- Recreational activities such as swimming, canoeing, or participating in open water events, such as triathlons, or adventure racing.
- Farmers, rice and sugarcane field workers, miners, slaughterhouse and sewer workers, and veterinarians may also be at risk through their occupation.
- Leptospirosis is rarely spread from person to person.

Diagnosis and Treatment

- Leptospirosis is diagnosed by testing blood or urine.
- People who think they may have leptospirosis should see a health care provider immediately.
- Antibiotics may be prescribed to reduce symptoms and duration of disease.

Prevention

- Avoid contact with water, soil and vegetation contaminated with urine from animals.
- Avoid direct contact with urine from animals. Wear gloves if contact with urine is likely to occur, and wash hands after any exposure to urine from animals.
- Wear protective clothing and footwear in areas possibly contaminated with urine from animals.
- Vaccinate farm animals and dogs for leptospirosis (however, the vaccination may not protect against all types of *Leptospira* bacteria.)
- Control rodents around the home and in recreation areas with human presence.

Report all cases to El Paso Department of Public Health by calling 915-771-5810

