

What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a potentially serious illness caused by the bacteria, *Leptospira*, affecting animals and people. Leptospirosis is present worldwide, and is more common in tropical countries with heavy rainfall. In the United States, an estimated 100 to 200 cases of leptospirosis are identified each year. Most of these cases result from drinking or swimming in contaminated water, or direct contact with infected animals. Since the year 2000, there has only been one case of leptospirosis reported in Oklahoma.

How is leptospirosis spread?

Leptospirosis is transmitted by contact with fresh water, mud, or vegetation contaminated by the urine or tissues of infected animals. *Leptospira* bacteria generally enter the body through breaks in the skin or through the eyes, nose, or mouth. It is also spread by direct contact with urine or tissues from an infected animal. Many different kinds of wild and domestic animals including dogs, rats, and swine may be carriers of the disease. Infected animals may pass the bacteria in their urine for a long period of time without showing signs of sickness. Another way that leptospirosis is spread is by eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Person-to-person spread of leptospirosis is rare.

Who is most likely to get leptospirosis?

People who work handling animals or animal tissues are at higher risk of getting leptospirosis. These occupational groups include farmers, veterinarians, and workers in rice fields, mines, sewer systems, and slaughterhouses.

What are the symptoms of leptospirosis in people?

Common symptoms of leptospirosis include fever, headache, chills, nausea and vomiting, muscle aches especially in the calves and thighs, and eye redness. In some cases, the illness may be more severe and progress to liver damage and yellowing of the eyes and skin, kidney failure, internal bleeding resulting in anemia, or meningitis.

How soon after exposure do symptoms of leptospirosis appear?

Most people develop symptoms ten days after exposure. However, symptoms may develop as soon as two days after exposure and as long as 30 days following exposure.

How is leptospirosis diagnosed?

Leptospirosis is typically diagnosed by a blood test.

What is the treatment for leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is treatable with antibiotics prescribed by a physician. It is best to start treatment as early as possible. Hospitalization and supportive care may be required for more serious cases.

How can leptospirosis be prevented?

- Limit contact with water, mud, or vegetation that might be contaminated with the urine of infected animals, especially rats or mice.
- Immunize dogs and farm animals against leptospirosis.
- Prevent contamination of human living, working, and recreational areas with animal urine.
- Persons in high-risk occupational groups should wear equipment, such as boots, aprons, gloves, and eye goggles to protect their eyes, nose, mouth, and skin from contacting infected animal tissue or urine.

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