

[dkpdf-button]

What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a disease that affects humans and animals. It is caused by bacteria called *Leptospira*. In humans, it can cause a wide range of symptoms, some of which may be mistaken for other diseases.

Who gets leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is most common in tropical climates. On average, 100-150 cases of human illness are reported annually in the United States. People who work outdoors or with animals or those involved in freshwater activities may be at increased risk for infection.

How is leptospirosis spread?

Many different kinds of domestic and wild animals may carry *Leptospira* bacteria and excrete these bacteria in their urine or other body fluids. Humans can be exposed to these bacteria by direct contact with the urine or body fluids of an infected animal or by drinking or having contact with water (such as through swimming, rafting or kayaking) or soil that has been contaminated by urine or body fluids of infected animals. Depending on the conditions, these bacteria can survive in the environment for prolonged periods of time. Animals that commonly carry the bacteria include rodents, cattle, swine, dogs, and horses. In general, the bacteria are not transmitted from person to person.

What are the symptoms of leptospirosis?

People exposed to leptospirosis may have severe symptoms or no symptoms at all. Leptospirosis can result in flu-like symptoms such as sudden fever, chills, headache, severe body aches and fatigue. In about 10% of cases, a more severe illness involving liver, kidneys or the nervous system may occur. The disease may last for several weeks.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The time from exposure to the bacteria to onset of symptoms ranges from two days to four weeks with a range of 5-14 days most common.

How is leptospirosis diagnosed?

Leptospirosis is often diagnosed using specific laboratory tests on blood samples.

What is the treatment for leptospirosis?

Specific antibiotics may be prescribed by a doctor to treat leptospirosis. It is important for people

with this disease to receive treatment as soon as possible.

How can leptospirosis be prevented?

There are several ways to prevent leptospirosis, including:

- Seeing a veterinarian to get vaccines for pets that can protect against this disease.
- Avoiding contact with animal urine or body fluids, especially if you have any cuts or abrasions on the skin.
- Not swimming in, walking in, or swallowing water that may contain animal urine.
- Wearing protective clothing or footwear near soil or water that may be contaminated with animal urine.

Is there a vaccine available to protect against leptospirosis?

There is no vaccine available for humans. There are vaccines available for animals. Consult with your veterinarian regarding vaccination of pets.

How can I get more information about leptospirosis?

- If you have concerns about leptospirosis, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at the [VDH Local Health Districts page](#).
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [the CDC page on leptospirosis](#).

November 2018

Opens pdf to download

Opens document to download

Opens in a new window

External link will open in new window. Click link to exit Virginia Department of Health Website.