

## LEPTOSPIROSIS

### **What is leptospirosis?**

Leptospirosis (“lepto”) is an infection caused by bacteria from the genus *Leptospira*. It can infect both humans and animals.

### **How do people get infected with lepto?**

The most common route of infection is through contact of broken skin or the mucous membranes (nose, mouth, eyes) with contaminated water. Water becomes contaminated by the urine of infected domestic or wild animals or people. People who come in contact with urine or tissues of infected animals can also contract the infection.

### **How is lepto maintained in nature?**

Wild and domestic animals are infected with *Leptospira*, and excrete the bacteria in their urine. Some animals can be infected and shed *Leptospira* bacteria for long periods without showing signs of illness.

### **Who is at greatest risk of becoming infected with lepto?**

Farmers, sewer workers, veterinarians, and fish workers can be exposed at work. In infected areas, the disease is a recreational hazard to bathers, campers, hunters, and fishing enthusiasts.

### **What are the symptoms of lepto infection?**

The time between a person’s exposure to the bacteria and becoming sick can range from two days to four weeks. Many people show no signs of infection, others have fever, headache, chills, red eyes, and sore muscles. Severe infections result in anemia, jaundice, liver failure, kidney failure, meningitis, and respiratory distress.

### **How is lepto infection diagnosed?**

Blood or urine tests are used to see if a person is infected.

### **How is lepto treated?**

Leptospirosis is treated with antibiotics, such as doxycycline or penicillin. These should be given early in the disease. Intravenous antibiotics may be needed for persons with more severe symptoms.

### **How can infection be prevented?**

The chances of getting leptospirosis can be greatly reduced by avoiding swimming or wading in water that might be contaminated with animal urine. People whose job or recreational activities exposes them to contaminated water or soil should wear protective clothing or footwear. Because rodents are common carriers of *Leptospira*, proper control of rodents around homes and buildings is important. Keep your dogs’

vaccination against leptospirosis current to reduce the potential for your dog to become infected and pass the infection to you.

**Where can I get more information about leptospirosis?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has information available at their website [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/leptospirosis\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/leptospirosis_g.htm).

Another good website is: <http://www.astdhpphe.org/infect/lepto.html>.