

Leptospirosis (Weil's disease)

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Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection which can infect humans and animals (most commonly rodents, cattle, pigs and dogs). The bacteria are spread to people through direct contact with tissue or body fluids from an infected animal or through contact with freshwater (or wet soil) contaminated with infected animal urine. Activities such as kayaking, outdoor swimming, fishing or working with animals or animal parts increase the risk of infection. Travellers visiting areas where flooding is a problem may also be at risk.

Transmission from person to person is rare. Leptospirosis occurs frequently throughout tropical areas of the world but is not common in the UK.

Leptospirosis can start with symptoms such as a high temperature, headache, feeling nauseous and vomiting, aching muscles and joints, red eyes and loss of appetite. Some people get a more serious infection with yellow skin and eyes (jaundice), swollen ankles, feet or hands, chest pain, shortness of breath and coughing up blood.

Treatment for leptospirosis is usually with antibiotics, most people fully recover in a few days or weeks. Over the counter pharmacy medications can be used to treat fever and pain. More serious infection may require hospital treatment.

There is no human vaccine to prevent infection from leptospirosis.

Prevention

The risk of leptospirosis infection can be reduced by taking the following precautions:

- Avoid contact with water, soil or animal products that may be contaminated with animal urine: cuts or abrasions on the skin should be covered with a waterproof plaster.
- Don't wade, swim in or swallow floodwaters or water from lakes, rivers or swamps. If such activity is unavoidable, limit your time in the water.
- Shower as soon as possible after unavoidable contact with water that may be contaminated.
- Always drink boiled or treated water.

There is no vaccination or medication to prevent leptospirosis. A review of the use of antibiotics (doxycycline) to prevent leptospirosis states that data does not support the practice in all cases, though short-term travellers with potential for high risk exposure may be helped (see Brett-Major DM, Lipnick RJ publication in resources below).

Resources

- [UKHSA: Leptospirosis](#)
- [World Health Organization: Leptospirosis Fact sheet](#)

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Leptospirosis](#)
- [Brett-Major DM, Lipnick RJ. Antibiotic prophylaxis for leptospirosis. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2009, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD007342. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD007342.pub2.](#)