

FACT SHEET: Leptospirosis

by: Animal Health & Production Division



What is it?

Leptospirosis is a disease caused by bacteria which live in the kidneys and genitals of many types of animals. Leptospirosis is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can affect both humans and animals.

What are the signs and symptoms in people?

Leptospirosis usually starts with flu-like symptoms. Symptoms usually start within 5-14 days, but can appear as soon as 2 days, or up to 30 days after contact with the bacteria.

It can cause a wide range of symptoms, but many of these can be mistaken for other diseases. In addition, some infected persons may have no symptoms at all.

Symptoms include:

- High fever
- Headache
- Chills
- Muscle aches
- Vomiting
- Jaundice (yellow skin and eyes)
- Red eyes
- Abdominal Pain
- Diarrhoea
- Rash

Who is most at risk?

Anyone can get Leptospirosis, but some are more at risk due to their location and their work in Fiji. The cyclone season also increases the risk of Leptospirosis due to higher rainfall and flooding.

Some examples of workers at risk:

- Farmers
- Crop farmers
- Slaughterhouse workers
- Fish workers
- Dairy farmers

However, household transmission of leptospirosis

has become increasingly common in urban areas with poor overall sanitation infrastructures.

How could I get infected?

Rats, dogs, cats, cattle, pigs, horses and mongooses can carry and spread infection but some animals may have no symptoms of the disease. Cattle with leptospirosis sometimes abort in the last trimester or you might notice a sudden drop in milk production in a large number of your milking cows.



A dairy farm in Namosi

People can get infected by contact with water, flood, mud, food which has been contaminated by urine or body fluids from infected animals. Rats visiting the kitchen of homes can also contaminate food and utensils with feces and urine. The bacteria can survive in soil or water for weeks, even months.

Pet animals particularly unvaccinated dogs can easily get infected from their environment or from rats and mongooses. And humans handling their sick pets are at risk of getting infected. Spreading the disease from one person to another is possible but not common.

How does infection start?

The bacteria gets into your body through cuts/

scratches or broken skin or through the eyes, mouth or nose.

You can get it while:

- Drinking contaminated water
- Wading in flood waters
- Playing in rivers or lakes
- Hunting
- Gardening in farm soil, working with crops
- Walking barefoot in paddocks or gardens
- Touching sick animals
- Eating or drinking contaminated food or water
- Smoking without washing your hands after animal contact
- Cleaning out sheds where animals live especially rats, mice, mongoose etc.
- Working in forests
- Sharing utensils with sick family members

How serious is it?

Without treatment, Leptospirosis can lead to kidney damage, meningitis (inflammation of the membrane around the brain and spinal cord), liver failure, respiratory distress, and even death.

If you or anyone you know has any of the above symptoms, you should seek urgent medical attention at your nearest healthcare facility.

Early treatment by a Doctor is key to preventing complications and deaths. Any cattle abortions should be reported to your locality officers and veterinarians of the Ministry of Agriculture for further investigation.

How do I protect myself and others?

- Avoiding wading/swimming in waters that may be contaminated with animal urine, especially flood waters.
- Wearing protective clothing and footwear when working with livestock.
- Separating households from livestock e.g. through the use of fences/pens.
- Regular household cleaning.
- Getting rid of rats in the household.
- Keeping your food and eating/cooking utensils away from rats and pets
- Washing fruits and vegetables.
- Take care during milking of cows to ensure urine does not splash into eyes or mouth.

