

Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is a disease that is caused by a number of different bacteria called *Leptospira*. *Leptospira* bacteria have been found in both domestic and wild animals.

Humans become infected through contact with water, food, or soil contaminated with urine from infected animals such as rodents. This may happen by; swallowing contaminated food or water, through skin contact (especially if there are skin abrasions), or contact with mucosal surfaces such as the eyes, mouth or nose.

The disease occurs most commonly in people who are exposed to the bacteria through their work, for example farm workers (particularly banana farm workers in north Qld), veterinarians, and meat workers. However cases have been reported from exposure during outdoor activities such as swimming, wading and white-water rafting in rivers, lakes and dams. Cases often increase after flood events.

Signs and Symptoms:

The disease varies in severity. Many people experience fever, headaches, and muscle pain. Nausea, vomiting and bloodshot eyes may also occur. If left untreated, some people develop complications. In rare instances, these complications can be fatal.

The illness usually lasts from three days to three weeks. Recovery can take much longer if left untreated.

Treatment:

Prompt treatment with appropriate antibiotics is recommended to avoid complications and prolonged illness.

Prevention:

The Cover-Wash-Clean Up strategy can help to prevent being infected with *Leptospira*.

Cover all cuts, grazes and abrasions with waterproof dressings and wear dry, full-cover boots or shoes, gloves, aprons and long sleeve shirts when handling animals (eg. milking, trimming, tagging and birthing), soil, vegetation or animal feed that is possibly contaminated.

Wash hands thoroughly on a regular basis, and shower after work. Handwashing is particularly important before touching the mouth, nose or eyes (such as when smoking or eating). It is also important to wash hands, arms and contaminated clothing immediately after any contact with animals, animal carcasses, animal tissues (eg. aborted material), or liquids that may be contaminated with urine, faeces or blood from animals.

Clean Up both workplace and home. Keeping living and working spaces clean and tidy discourages rodents and minimises the chance of contact with animal urine. The *Leptospira* bacteria are readily killed by disinfectants.

You can also prevent the contamination of living and recreational areas by excluding potentially infected animals from these areas.

Health outcome:

People with leptospirosis usually recover well after antibiotic treatment. Hospitalisation may be required for more complicated cases.

A person who has had leptospirosis can develop the disease again as there are a number of different strains of the bacteria. It is unlikely that they would be reinfected with the same strain.

Help and assistance:

For further information, please contact your local doctor or nearest [public health unit](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/contact-us/contact/public-health-units) (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/contact-us/contact/public-health-units>).

Other resources

More information on leptospirosis can be found on the [Forensics and Scientific Services](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/healthsupport/businesses/forensic-and-scientific-services/testing-analysis/diseases/leptospirosis) (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/healthsupport/businesses/forensic-and-scientific-services/testing-analysis/diseases/leptospirosis>) webpage

References

Heymann, D. (Ed). 2008. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 19th Ed. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association, pp 306-309.

[European Centre For Disease Prevention and Control](https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/leptospirosis) (<https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/leptospirosis>)

World Health Organization, [Western Pacific region](http://www.wpro.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs_13082012_leptospirosis/en/) (http://www.wpro.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs_13082012_leptospirosis/en/)

URL: <http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/33/88/leptospirosis>

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