



One minute guide to...

WEIL'S DISEASE (Leptospirosis)

What is it and how is it spread?

Leptospirosis is caused by a bacterial infection. The infection is spread by contact with the bacteria in urine of infected animals - commonly rats, mice, cows, pigs, and dogs. Currently it is rare in the UK, and it's very rare to get leptospirosis from pets, other people, or bites.

In most cases, leptospirosis causes a mild illness with 'flu-like symptoms and red eyes (see below). But, in some people, a more severe illness occurs. This more severe form is commonly referred to as Weil's disease which occurs 1 to 3 days after the milder illness with symptoms of jaundice (yellow skin/eyes), rash, shortness of breath/cough; skin rash; tummy pain; or swollen feet, ankles, hands (see below). The main treatment for leptospirosis is antibiotics and most people make a full recovery.

You are at risk in the following situations:

- soil or freshwater (such as water from a river, canal, or lake) that contains infected urine gets in your mouth, eyes, or a cut – usually during activities like kayaking, outdoor swimming or fishing
- you touch an infected animal's blood or flesh – usually from working with animals or animal parts

How to reduce your risk:

- wash your hands with soap and water after handling animals or animal products
- clean any wounds as soon as possible & cover any cuts and grazes with waterproof plasters
- wear protective clothing if you're at risk through your job
- shower as soon as possible if you've been in potentially infected water
- check your dog is vaccinated against leptospirosis (there is no vaccine for people)

Do not:

- do not touch water or soil that may contain animal pee
- do not touch dead animals with your bare hands
- do not drink water from places like rivers, canals, or lakes – always boil or treat it first

Make a GP appointment if you have been in contact with infected urine and you have the following symptoms:

- a high temperature, or you feel hot and shivery with aching muscles and joints
- a headache
- been feeling sick (nausea), loss of appetite, or you have diarrhoea and vomiting
- red eyes

Make an URGENT appointment to see your GP if you have:

- a rash and /or yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)
- been unable to pee
- swollen ankles, feet, or hands
- shortness of breath
- been coughing up blood

Further Information:

NHS information: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/leptospirosis/>
<https://patient.info/infections/leptospirosis-and-weils-disease>

Guide developed by the Education IPC Public Health & Communities Team March 24



Working for Cumberland Council and
Westmorland & Furness Council