



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Kona 322-4877, Kauai 241-3563

Leptospirosis

What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that affects humans and animals. The disease occurs all over the world, but is most common in warm climates.

How do you get it?

You can get leptospirosis by swimming or wading in freshwater puddles, ponds, or streams contaminated with infected animal urine, or by coming into contact with wet soil or plants contaminated with animal urine. The bacterium enters the body through broken skin or through the soft tissues on the insides of the mouth, nose, or eyes. You can also get it by direct contact with urine, blood, or tissues from an infected animal. **Leptospirosis is not spread from person to person.**

What are the symptoms of leptospirosis?

The symptoms include fever, headache, chills, sweating, muscle pain, painful eyes, and vomiting. Occasionally, yellowing (jaundice) of the skin and the whites of the eyes and a rash may also occur. If not treated, the patient can develop kidney, liver, blood, and nervous tissue damage. In rare cases, death may occur. In many persons, however, the infection can be mild and without obvious symptoms.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually start 7 to 14 days after being infected, but the onset can range from 2 to 20 days. Symptoms may last from a few days to several weeks.

What is the treatment for leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis can be treated with an antibiotic prescribed by your doctor.

How can you keep from getting it?

Avoid swimming or wading in freshwater streams or ponds in Hawaii, especially when you have open cuts or sores. Swimming with your head underwater also increases your risk of infection through the eyes, nose, and mouth.

Do not drink pond or stream water without boiling or chemically treating it.

Wear protective clothing, such as waterproof boots and gloves when in contact with wet soil where leptospirosis is a problem.

What to do if you get sick:

If you think you may have leptospirosis, tell your doctor. Be sure to share information about recent travels and contact with freshwater or animal contact.

For more information:

See the CDC's website at:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub_lepto.htm, or contact the Hawaii State Department of Health at: (808) 586-4586 on Oahu; (808) 933-0912 in Hilo; (808) 322-4877 in Kona; and (808) 241-3563 on Kauai.