

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## LEPTOSPIROSIS

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that affects humans and animals. It is caused by bacteria called *Leptospira*.

### Symptoms

In humans, symptoms generally appear within 7 days, but it may take up to 3-4 weeks.

- First phase:
  - Fever and chills, beginning suddenly
  - Headache, muscle aches
  - Red eyes
  - Vomiting or diarrhea
  - Stiff neck
- Second phase:
  - Sometimes, a person gets better, and then gets sick again. This second phase for most people includes headaches, stiff neck, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. The person usually has only a slight fever if at all.
  - 5-10% of people with leptospirosis develop severe symptoms during the second phase, such as yellow skin or eyes, nausea, vomiting, rash, pain in the belly, difficulty breathing, and making less urine than usual. This severe form is also called Weil's disease.
- The illness lasts from a few days to 3 weeks or longer. Without treatment, recovery may take several months. In rare cases, people can die from leptospirosis.

### Transmission

- *Leptospira* live in water contaminated with the urine (pee) of infected animals. Contaminated water can infect a person when they swallow the water, eat contaminated food, or get water in eyes, nose, or in cuts or broken skin.
- People who work outdoors or with animals (farmers or farm field workers, sewer workers, mine workers, veterinarians, fish workers, or military personnel) are more likely to catch leptospirosis, as well as people who touch contaminated water when camping, swimming, wading, and boating.
- Most cases of leptospirosis in the United States occur in Hawaii. This disease is rare in Ohio.
- Leptospirosis does not spread from person to person.

### Treatment

- Leptospirosis is confirmed by laboratory testing of a blood or urine sample.
- Leptospirosis is treated with antibiotics. People who get treated early on have the best chance of getting better. Persons with symptoms suggestive of leptospirosis should contact a health care provider.

### Prevention

- The risk of acquiring leptospirosis can be greatly reduced by avoiding swimming or wading in water that might be contaminated with animal urine. Wear shoes or waders when venturing into areas with contaminated water or soil.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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