



Diseases Fact Sheet - Leptospirosis

South Dakota Department of Health

Office of Disease Prevention Services - 605-773-3737 -(1-800-592-1861 in South Dakota only)

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What is it?

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease associated with wild and domestic animals. It causes severe systemic symptoms including jaundice.

Who gets leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is primarily an occupational disease that affects farmers, sewer workers or others whose occupation involves contact with animals, especially rats.

How is it spread?

Leptospirosis is spread mainly by the urine of infected animals and is generally not transmitted from person to person.

What are the symptoms of leptospirosis?

The symptoms of leptospirosis are fever, headache, chills, vomiting, jaundice, anemia and sometimes rash. People with leptospirosis are usually quite ill and are often hospitalized.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

The incubation period is usually 10 days with a range of four to 10 days.

How is leptospirosis diagnosed?

The disease is diagnosed using specific blood tests available through public health laboratories.

Does past infection with leptospirosis make a person immune?

There are several strains of the organism. Infection with one usually provides immunity to that organism but not to other strains.

What is the treatment for leptospirosis?

The antibiotics of choice are penicillin, streptomycin, tetracycline and erythromycin. Kidney dialysis may be necessary.



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What are the complications associated with leptospirosis?

If not treated, the patient could develop kidney damage. In rare cases, death may occur.

What can be done to prevent the spread of leptospirosis?

Disease prevention consists of good sanitation. The use of boots and gloves in hazardous places, rodent control and immunization of farm and pet animals can also minimize the risk of spread.