

Understanding Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is a serious bacterial disease that affects both animals and humans. It is found worldwide and poses a significant risk to public and pet health.

Who Is at Risk?

Leptospirosis is a **zoonotic disease**, meaning it can be transmitted from animals to people.

Affected Group	Primary Source of Infection
Humans	Contact with water or soil contaminated by infected animal urine.
Pets (Dogs)	Swimming or drinking contaminated water (puddles, lakes, streams).
Wildlife	Rodents (rats, mice) are common carriers and shed the bacteria in their urine.
Livestock	Cattle, pigs, and horses can become infected and transmit the disease.

How Does Infection Occur?

The *Leptospira* bacteria is typically shed in the urine of infected animals. Infection happens when the bacteria enter the body through:

- **Breaks in the Skin:** Cuts, abrasions, or scratches.
- **Mucous Membranes:** Eyes, nose, or mouth.
- **Ingestion:** Drinking contaminated water.

Exposure is often associated with contact with **contaminated water, mud, or wet soil**, especially after flooding or heavy rainfall.

Signs & Symptoms

Symptoms can be highly variable, ranging from mild illness to life-threatening conditions. In both humans and pets, the initial symptoms often resemble the flu.

In Dogs

Symptoms are often more severe in pets due to rapid organ damage. Watch for:

- Fever
 - Lethargy and Depression
 - Loss of Appetite (Anorexia)
 - Increased Thirst and Urination (can progress to inability to urinate)
 - Jaundice
 - Vomiting and Diarrhea
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Treatment and Recovery

- **Early Intervention:** Leptospirosis is treated with **antibiotics** (such as doxycycline or penicillin). Treatment is most effective when started as soon as symptoms appear.
 - **Hospitalization:** Severe cases may require IV fluids, oxygen, or dialysis if the kidneys are failing.
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Prevention Strategies

Prevention is the best defense against leptospirosis.

- **Vaccination (Dogs):** Consult your veterinarian about the Leptospirosis vaccine. This is highly recommended for dogs that:
 - Spend time outdoors (yard, parks).
 - Drink from puddles or standing water.
 - Have potential exposure to wildlife or livestock.
 - **Avoid Contaminated Water:** Do not swim or wade in freshwater where the presence of animal urine is possible. Never drink untreated water from lakes, rivers, or streams.
 - **Rodent Control:** Implement effective rodent control around homes and workplaces, as rodents are common carriers.
 - **Use Protective Gear (Humans):** When working in potentially contaminated environments (farming, gardening, clearing flood debris), wear waterproof boots, gloves, and protective clothing to cover cuts and abrasions.
 - **Hygiene:** Practice good hand hygiene, especially after handling pets, gardening, or outdoor activities.
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If you suspect you or your pet have been exposed or are showing symptoms, seek medical or veterinary care immediately.