



**Kamehameha Schools Kapalama
Program Services / Medical Services**

Fact Sheet on Leptospirosis

What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection that is transmitted from animals to humans. Nationally, Hawaii has more cases of leptospirosis than any other state due to our year-round tropical climate. Rats and mice are the most important carriers of the disease, but other animals like pigs, goats, cattle, dogs, horses, and other wild animals can also carry the disease. The bacteria can survive for long periods of time in fresh water and mud.

How can you get the disease?

People get leptospirosis by contact with fresh water, damp soil, or vegetation contaminated by the urine of infected animals. Swimming or wading in freshwater ponds or streams, drinking contaminated fresh water, contact with mucosal surfaces such as the eyes or nose, or with broken skin (cuts, scratches, etc.). About two-thirds of Hawaii's cases occurred in people with abrasions or cuts on the skin exposed to contaminated water.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may occur 2 – 28 days after exposure and may present initially as a “flu-like “ illness similar to flu, dengue, malaria, and other infections with fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, vomiting, and diarrhea lasting 5-7 days. After this time most people recover. However, a small percentage of people may develop a second phase of the illness that is more severe and can be dangerous.

How is leptospirosis diagnosed?

Leptospirosis is diagnosed by a special blood test that is ordered by your doctor.

What is the treatment?

If you think that you have symptoms of leptospirosis, you should see your doctor right away. Your doctor may treat you with antibiotics, which should be given early in the course of the disease.

How can I prevent myself from getting leptospirosis?

The risk of acquiring leptospirosis can be greatly reduced by not swimming or wading in water that might be contaminated with animal urine, especially if you have cuts or abrasions. If swimming, do not place your head underwater. Do not drink stream water without boiling or chemically treating it.