

## **Leptospirosis – Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is leptospirosis?**

Leptospirosis is a disease caused by the bacteria *Leptospira*. It is carried by many wild and domestic animals, including dogs, rodents, cows, pigs, horses and sheep. It is more commonly found in tropical climates.

The risk of direct transmission of leptospirosis to humans is considered low; transmission from dogs to humans does not occur frequently.

### **What are the symptoms in humans?**

Symptoms in humans appear 2 to 30 days after contact with the bacteria. Common symptoms may include fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle pain, and skin rashes. In more severe cases, symptoms may worsen to include jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), kidney and/or liver failure, inflammation of the heart muscle and meningitis.

### **What are the symptoms in dogs?**

Symptoms are non-specific and include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, refusal to eat, stiffness and pain.

### **How are the bacteria transmitted?**

The bacteria are spread through contact with water, soil or food contaminated by urine from infected animals. The bacteria enter through the skin, usually cuts or scratches, or through the nose, mouth, or eyes.

### **Can leptospirosis be treated?**

Antibiotics can be administered to reduce the length and severity of infection in both humans and animals.

### **What should people do if they have been exposed to leptospirosis (eg: household contact of a dog known to be infected) and then develop the symptoms?**

If you think you may have been exposed to leptospirosis AND you develop symptoms, see a health care provider or call 811 for health advice from a registered nurse. As long as you are feeling well there is NO NEED to seek medical attention.

### **What can pet owners do to protect themselves from infection?**

- Consult a veterinarian if a pet develops the symptoms of leptospirosis.
- Dog owners should discuss vaccination of their pet with their veterinarian.
- Practice personal hygiene and wash your hands frequently with soap under warm running water for at least 20 seconds after petting or handling animals and especially when cleaning up urine or animal waste.
- When cleaning up animal waste for any animal that appears ill, wear rubber gloves and wash your hands thoroughly afterwards.
- Pregnant or breast-feeding women, the elderly, young children and people with weakened immune systems should avoid cleaning up urine and animal wastes of sick animals.
- Avoid letting babies or toddlers crawl or play in areas of the yard where there may be fresh urine.

- Do not leave food or water outside where it can attract wildlife.

Sources:

- 1) British Columbia Centre for Disease Control. Communicable Disease Control Guidelines for the Prevention of Leptospirosis, 2008. Available from: [http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Epid/CD%20Manual/Chapter%201%20-%20CDC/EpidGLEptospirosis\\_Dec\\_2008.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Epid/CD%20Manual/Chapter%201%20-%20CDC/EpidGLEptospirosis_Dec_2008.pdf)
- 2) Government of Canada. Leptospirosis, 2016. Available from: <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/diseases/leptospirosis>