

Toolbox Talk

Leptospirosis



Leptospirosis is a form of bacterial infection, also known as Weil's Disease, that is carried by animals, most commonly in rats and cattle. The bacteria can enter through breaks in the skin, such as scratches or cuts, or through the lining of the mouth and nose after contact with urine contaminated water usually found in ditches, slow flowing rivers ... and derelict canals!

There are two types of Leptospirosis infection which affect people in the UK:

Weil's disease - this is a serious and sometimes fatal infection that is transmitted to humans by contact with urine from infected rats.

Hardjo form of Leptospirosis - this is transmitted from cattle to humans.



Symptoms

First symptoms are flu-like—persistent headaches, and possibly chills. Later symptoms can be vomiting, muscle pains and ultimately jaundice and kidney failure. It begins as a mild illness, which can be easily cured if treated early enough. If left untreated, it becomes more serious and in rare cases the disease can be fatal.

Symptoms can occur between 3 and 21 days from the time of infection.

Although the risk of infection is small, you should take sensible precautions:

Do

- ✓ Cover, with waterproof plasters, all open scratches, cuts, sores and skin affected by eczema etc.
- ✓ Wash your hands before eating, drinking or smoking, and after you have finished working.
- ✓ Wear protective equipment you are provided with—including rubber gloves and boots.
- ✓ Wash thoroughly, and as soon as possible, if you have entered the water.
- ✓ See a doctor if you feel ill with flu-like symptoms, and tell them you have been working near water.
- ✓ Site Leader should ensure there are adequate washing facilities and first aid on site.
- ✓ **Important:** If the Doctor decides you have Leptospirosis tell your site leader who should then report it to WRG Head Office & the Health & Safety Executive.

Don't

- ✗ Don't encourage the presence of vermin — keep the site tidy and dispose of all rubbish correctly.
- ✗ Don't handle dead rats with unprotected hands; wherever possible use a shovel or other tool.
- ✗ Don't be tempted to drink any water on site (apart from what has been provided for drinking), even if it looks clean.
- ✗ Don't wear contaminated **site** clothing in food preparation or eating areas.

More information

Health & Safety Executive guidance

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/hazardous-substances/harmful-micro-organisms/leptospirosis-weils-disease.htm>