









Zoonoses Fact Sheet - Leptospirosis

<p>What is it?</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leptospirosis is a sickness caused by the bacteria <i>Leptospira</i>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the tropics of Australia the main types we see in dogs is <i>Leptospira interrogans</i> var. australis and <i>Leptospira interrogans</i> var. zanoni. These are also the main types we see in people in the tropics. Leptospirosis in people can be very mild, like flu. People will get fevers, headaches, aching joints and muscle pain. It can also make people very sick if it attacks the kidneys or lung. Leptospirosis in dogs can cause yellow gums, nose-bleeding, flu-like signs, and death  
<p>Where do we find it?</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main animals that carry leptospira in Australia are rats, bandicoots, pigs and cattle. These animals may not be sick at all, but the bacteria breeds up in their kidneys and then moves into the environment in the urine. Dogs sick with leptospirosis will also spread the disease through their urine. Leptospira can live around swamp land or where water sits in pools. Leptospira bacteria can survive 6 months in mud and longer in water. The bacteria seem to be in some areas and not in others. Check to see if you live in an area where Leptospirosis has been found in animals or people.
<p>How does Leptospirosis make people sick?</p>	<p>The bacteria can get into people from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urine with <i>Leptospira</i> in it: the bacteria can move into people's blood from urine splashing people's eyes, mouth or nose. This infection is mostly seen in abattoir workers and hunters who handle kidneys and urine. People drinking, playing or walking in water that has <i>Leptospira</i> in it. People getting dirt or mud on them that has <i>Leptospira</i> in it. Leptospira can move through the skin, especially if there are cuts on the skin 
<p>What EHP and community can do to stop Leptospirosis</p> 	<p>Public Health units usually know what communities may have contact with Leptospirosis. They will run public awareness programs. The EHP can also work to raise public awareness. The program should include things about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hand washing after touching dogs/ playing in mud Not handling urine from sick dogs Rodent control Stopping water pooling in yards Stopping dogs and children playing in swampy country Stopping dogs hunting wildlife that may be carrying Leptospirosis Talking to the EHP/ vet if dogs are dying very quickly.   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If dogs have had Leptospirosis in a house then the house should be cleaned with 1 part bleach to 10 parts water. Dog owners with sick dogs who then get a flu like illness should tell the EHP and clinic about their sick dog too. Dogs can be vaccinated against some kinds of Leptospirosis. The EHP can work with vets and clinic staff to find if animals in the community are carrying Leptospirosis and if it is the same type that people are getting.

Source: Dr Sam Phelan, *Dog Health Programs in Remote Communities: an EHP guide* 2010