

Leptospirosis (Rat Fever)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

1. Q: What is Leptospirosis?^{1,2}

A: It is an illness transmitted through mud or water contaminated by the urine of infected animals and is characterized by fever, headache, chills, muscle pains (myalgia), conjunctival suffusion (red eyes), and less frequently by meningitis, rash, jaundice (yellowish discoloration of the skin and eyes), or kidney failure.

2. Q: How do people get leptospirosis?²

A: There are two common ways to get leptospirosis:

- Exposure to urine or body fluids of infected animals
- Drinking or contact with water or soil that has been contaminated with urine or body fluids of infected animals

3. Q: How soon should I expect the symptoms of leptospirosis?²

A: Symptoms of leptospirosis can develop anytime between 2 days to 4 weeks after being exposed to bacteria causing leptospirosis.

4. Q: Which animals can spread leptospirosis to humans?²

A: Many animals can spread leptospirosis, including pets (e.g. dogs), farm animals, or wildlife. The animals that commonly develop or spread leptospirosis include: rats or rodents, cattle, swine (pigs), dogs, horses, sheeps, and goats

5. Q: When and where does leptospirosis occur?³

A: Leptospirosis is common in tropical and subtropical areas with high rainfall. In certain area, cases of leptospirosis peak during the rainy season and the illness may spread where flood occurs.

6. Q: How does leptospirosis occur?³

A: The leptospirosis bacteria enter the human body through cuts and cracks on the skin, or through membranes of the eyes, nose and mouth.

7. Q: Can I get leptospirosis from a sick household member?⁴

A: No, leptospirosis is not to be spread from human to human.

8. Q: When should I suspect that I may have leptospirosis?^{4,5}

A: You should recommended that you see a doctor immediately if you present with an acute febrile illness of at least 2 days **AND** either residing in a flooded area or has high-risk exposure (wading in flood waters, swimming in flood water or ingestion of contaminated water with or without cuts or wounds)**AND** presenting with at **AT LEAST TWO** of the following:

- Myalgia (muscle pain)
- Calf tenderness
- Conjunctival suffusion (red eyes)
- Chills,
- Abdominal pain
- Headache
- Jaundice (yellowish discoloration of skin and eyes)

- Oliguria (decreasing amount of urine)

9. Q: How is leptospirosis treated?²

A: Once your doctor has confirmed that your symptoms are that of leptospirosis and by doing a test, you likely be treated with antibiotics. Treatment is most effective when started as soon as possible.

10. Q: Do I need to be hospitalized to receive treatment for leptospirosis?⁵

A:No, not all individuals suspected for leptospirosis need hospitalization.

Any suspected case of leptospirosis but have stable vital signs, good urine output, no jaundice or difficulty in breathing and able to take oral medication may be managed on an out-patient setting.

On the other hand, those with unstable vital signs (e.g. very low blood pressure), jaundice, abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhea, low urine output, severe headache or changes in mental alertness or with difficulty in breathing are best managed in a hospital setting.

11. Q: Can leptospirosis be prevented?^{2,3}

A: Yes, leptospirosis can be prevented by several ways:

- Have your pets vaccinated against leptospirosis
- Avoid contact with animal urine or body fluids, especially if there are cuts or abrasions of the skin.
- Wear protective clothing or footwear near soil or water that may be contaminated with animal urine
- Consume boiled water, especially during the rainy season
- Avoid swimming or wading in muddy ponds and slowly moving streams especially those located near farms or stagnant water
- Control rats and mice around the home on a regular basis

12. Q: During periods of natural disaster like floods and typhoons, is there any available drug to take to prevent leptospirosis?

A: Yes, medications are available to help prevent leptospirosis however it is still best to consult your physician to identify your risk and to be given proper instructions regarding medications, if needed.

13. Q: Are all drugs for leptospirosis safe for all age groups?

A: Unfortunately, not all medications used for leptospirosis prophylaxis and its treatment are safe for all age groups. Doxycycline, which is used as a prophylactic agent and for treatment of leptospirosis, cannot be given to children 8 years old and below.

14. Q: Can I take doxycycline if I am pregnant or breast-feeding?

A: No, doxycycline is contraindicated in pregnant and breast-feeding mothers.

15. Q: How can I protect my child from leptospirosis if he cannot take doxycycline?

A: The best way to prevent leptospirosis in children is to avoid wading in flood waters. It is also advisable to wear protective clothing and footwear near soil or water that may be contaminated with animal urine.

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