



# LEPTOSPIROSIS: Information for transport and sale yard workers



This fact sheet provides information about the risk of leptospirosis infection in transport and sale yard workers, and others visiting sale yards.

## KEY POINTS

- > Leptospirosis is easy to catch from an infected animal and its environment.
- > Infection can occur through breaks in the skin or through mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth.
- > Protect yourself, your family and staff by vaccinating your animals, controlling rodents, practicing good personal hygiene, using protective equipment, and seeking help early if you feel unwell.

## WHAT IS LEPTOSPIROSIS?

Leptospirosis is an infectious disease transmitted from animals to humans (a zoonosis), and from animal to animal, through cuts or cracks in the skin or through the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth. It is present in almost

all warm-blooded mammals, including farm, domestic and feral animals.

Leptospirosis spreads easily, and is caused by bacteria known as leptospires that multiply in the kidneys of animals and are shed in the urine. The bacteria thrive in moist or wet conditions and can survive for months.

## HOW ARE PEOPLE INFECTED?

People can catch leptospirosis from infected animal urine. Even a splash or fine spray of urine or indirect contact with urine-contaminated water can spread large numbers of leptospires.

Cuts, sores and skin grazes increase the risk of infection, as does licking your lips and eating or smoking before washing and drying your hands.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS IN PEOPLE?

People affected by leptospirosis, either mildly or severely, may not show symptoms.

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Infection may just feel like a bad case of the flu, with headaches and fever. Severe cases can result in permanent complications, usually kidney or liver damage. Some people may be unable to work for months and, in severe cases, be unable to return to work at all. The disease can keep coming back.

Pregnant women can miscarry. Death from infection is rare.

### **WHEN ARE TRANSPORT WORKERS AT RISK OF INFECTION?**

Transport workers/stock truck drivers are at risk through regular exposure to animal urine during their everyday activities, such as:

- > loading or unloading stock
- > checking the truck during transit stops
- > emptying or cleaning effluent tanks
- > hosing down the truck
- > working underneath the truck where contaminated water may collect eg in the wheel housing
- > changing a tyre.

### **WHEN ARE SALE YARD/STOCK YARD WORKERS AT RISK OF INFECTION?**

Sale yard/stock yard workers are at risk through regular exposure to animal urine during their everyday activities, such as:

- > handling stock in the yards
- > working in or walking past auction sorting pens
- > cleaning the area with a high-pressure hose
- > handling contaminated wooden railings
- > walking in wet or muddy areas in bare feet or jandals.

### **WHO ELSE IS AT RISK?**

Anyone visiting or working in/around transport or sale yard areas is at risk, including:

- > livestock buyers
- > stock agents



- > visitors to sales and A&P shows
- > maintenance workers, especially plumbers, tank cleaners and others working in water
- > children 'parked' in a buggy or pram.

### **HOW DO YOU MANAGE THE RISK AND PROTECT AGAINST INFECTION?**

#### **AWARENESS**

- > Clearly display information that leptospirosis may be a risk in the work area. Make sure new workers and anyone else who will be in close contact with animals, are aware of the risks and what to do before entering the work area.
- > Always be aware of what's going on around you. Look out for and avoid situations where you might be splashed with urine or urine-contaminated water.

#### **PPE**

- > Wear clean, suitable PPE. This may include overalls, and sturdy, waterproof footwear.
- > Wear face protection if you're working with unsettled animals.
- > Wear gloves where permitted and if you have split or grazed skin.
- > Change gloves or boots immediately if they split or leak.
- > Remove PPE if contaminated and store well away from where people eat.
- > Make sure whoever cleans PPE is aware of potential contamination.

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## HYGIENE

Personal hygiene is good additional protection.

- > Wash your hands regularly, using water, soap, and disinfectant – especially after using the toilet or handling livestock, and before eating, drinking, smoking, or taking a break. Wash your face if you have facial hair.
- > Use disposable towels only.
- > Don't scrub your hands harshly as it may cause breaks in the skin.
- > Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth before washing your hands.
- > Cover cuts, grazes, blisters and skin breaks with waterproof coverings, and change coverings regularly.
- > Make sure deeper wounds are fully healed before working closely with livestock.
- > Don't smoke, drink or eat when handling livestock, as this can introduce bacteria into the mouth. Keep coffee mugs away from the work area.
- > Wash your clothes after handling stock.
- > Keep toilets and hand-washing facilities clean.

## FURTHER CONTROLS

- > Regularly check effluent levels in transporter tanks to avoid overflows and roadside spillage during transport.
- > Keep ramps and other surfaces clean. Wash down affected areas as soon as possible.
- > Take care when using high pressure wash-down, ie Don't breathe in water spray and wear a mask. Direct spray away from people.
- > Don't transport infected animals.
- > Make sure any sick or injured animals are inspected by a vet before unloading.
- > Take extra process precautions if there is a greater risk of urine splash.
- > Where possible, avoid waterways when moving stock.

## WATCHING YOUR HEALTH

The sooner treatment starts, the better.

### FIRST AID

A readily available supply of clean water is important.

Look after your health. As soon as there is exposure to urine or infection is suspected:

- > dry off urine splash immediately (leptospire dry out easily), then wash the area
- > wash your hands and face well, taking particular care with facial hair
- > use soap and water, and dry well
- > flush out your mouth and eyes, and any exposed skin with lots of running water
- > wash out fresh or old cuts and grazes with water and disinfectant, and dry well
- > tell a supervisor.

### PRIMARY CARE TREATMENT

- > See a doctor within 24 hours of suspected exposure or if flu-like symptoms develop, to get antibiotic treatment and have a blood sample taken.
- > Tell the doctor that leptospirosis may be the cause of your illness – some doctors may not be familiar with the symptoms.
- > The blood sample **MUST** be taken before medication is taken, and a subsequent sample may be needed 3-4 weeks later.
- > Treatment options will depend on the severity and duration of the symptoms. Antibiotic treatment should be given if leptospirosis infection is strongly suspected.
- > All patients with severe infection or signs of meningitis should be sent to hospital immediately.

### FINDING OUT MORE

[Good Practice Guide: Prevention and Control of Leptospirosis](#)

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