



# Ministry of Health & Human Services

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## MHHS Reports Increase in Cases of Leptospirosis

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### KEY POINTS:

- **Leptospirosis is an infectious disease caused by bacteria of the genus *Leptospira* that affects humans and some wild and domestic animals.**
- **People can become infected through direct contact with urine from infected animals or contact with water, soil or food contaminated with urine from an infected animal.**
- **Illness may last for 3 weeks or longer. Without treatment, recovery may take months.**
- **Infection may be prevented by eliminating contact with potentially infected animals and avoiding exposure to bodies of water that might be contaminated and wearing appropriate clothing and footwear when there is a risk of exposure.**

The Ministry of Health & Human Services (MHHS) would like to inform the public that there has been an increase in cases of leptospirosis reported through routine communicable disease surveillance at the Belau National Hospital. There has been a total of 24 cases identified between January and August 24, 2021. They range from 15 to 88 years of age with males (67%) and persons 40 years of age and older (79%) accounting for the majority of cases.

### What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that affects both humans and animals. It is caused by bacteria of the genus *Leptospira*. Leptospirosis occurs in wild and domestic animals. These include, but are not limited to: cattle, dogs, pigs and rodents.

### How is it transmitted?

Leptospirosis is transmitted to humans through direct contact with urine (or other body fluids, except saliva) from infected animals; or contact with water, soil, or food contaminated with the urine of infected animals. *Leptospira* can enter the body through skin or mucous membranes (eyes, nose, or mouth), especially if there are cuts or abrasions on the skin. Transmission between humans is rare.

### What are the symptoms of leptospirosis?

The incubation period, or time between infection and when a person develops symptoms of illness, is anywhere from 2 days to 4 weeks, and illness may last for 3 weeks or longer. Without treatment, recovery may take as long as several months.

Leptospirosis infection results in a wide range of symptoms:

- High fever
- Headache

- Chills
- Muscle aches
- Vomiting
- Jaundice (yellow skin and eyes)
- Red eyes
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea
- Rash

Some infected persons may have no symptoms at all.

### **How is Leptospirosis Prevented?**

Leptospirosis occurs worldwide, but is most common in tropical climates. It is an occupational hazard for people who work primarily in outdoor settings or with animals, such as: farmers, veterinarians, slaughterhouse workers, dairy farmers and military workers. The disease is also associated with recreational activities in contaminated lakes and other freshwater sources as well as exposure to floodwater.

The risk of infection can be greatly reduced by practicing the following prevention measures:

- Wear waterproof protective clothing, shoes or boots near floodwater or other water or soil that may be contaminated with animal urine.
- Avoid wading and swimming in floodwater or any fresh water source that may contain urine or be contaminated by floodwater runoff.
- Cover cuts and abrasions on the body with waterproof bandages that seal out water.
- Prevent rodent infestation by keeping food, water and trash in closed containers. Avoid contact with sick animals.

### **When to see a doctor:**

Management of leptospirosis includes treatment with antibiotics in addition to supportive care for fever and pain. The MHHS would like to emphasize the importance of prevention and early detection of leptospirosis infection. Anyone who suspects they have symptoms of leptospirosis infection should seek medical attention immediately for proper diagnosis and treatment.

For more information about Leptospirosis and how to prevent infection, please contact:

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