

Leptospirosis

What is Leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is an infectious bacterial disease of animals and wildlife that leads to economic loss and poses a public health risk to communities.

Which animals are affected

- Almost all mammalian species can act as reservoirs of leptospires and serve as a source of infection for humans and other animals.
- Rodents shed leptospires throughout their lifespan without showing any clinical signs.

Can people be infected

Yes, people can get leptospirosis through direct or indirect routes, infections range from mild to severe.

How can I recognize leptospirosis?

In animals, the disease has two forms:

- The acute form is characterized by increased body temperature, anorexia, depression, jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), and anemic or hemorrhagic syndromes.
- The chronic form leads to abortions, stillbirths, premature or weak kids or lambs, anemia, jaundice and/or blood in the urine.

In humans the disease can range from mild to severe:

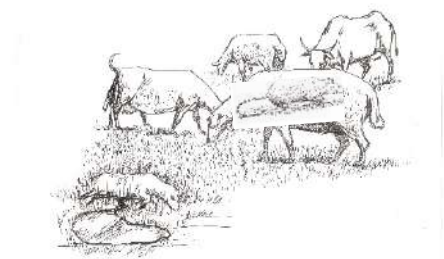
- Common signs include high fever, severe headache, chills, muscle aches and abdominal pain, vomiting, jaundice, diarrhea, rash, meningitis, and liver failure.
- Death can occur sometimes.

How is leptospirosis transmitted between animals?

- Infected animals shed bacteria in their urine and leptospires can be found in aborted or stillborn fetuses.
- Normal fetuses or vaginal discharge after lambing/kidding contaminate the environment.
- Direct contact with infected animals leads to infection through skin abrasions, nasal, oral, and conjunctival mucosa.
- Indirect exposure through water, soil, or feeds contaminated by urine or other body fluids from infected animals is the most common route.



Drinking contaminated water



Grazing on contaminated pastures

How is leptospirosis transmitted to humans?

Infection in humans occurs through:

- Direct contact with contaminated aborted fetuses, placentas and/or fetal fluids, and urine of infected animals.
- Indirect contact through contaminated water or soil; contact through scratched skin or cuts in mucous membranes such as the eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Eating or drinking contaminated food or water.



Risk: assisting during delivery



Risk: swimming in contaminated water

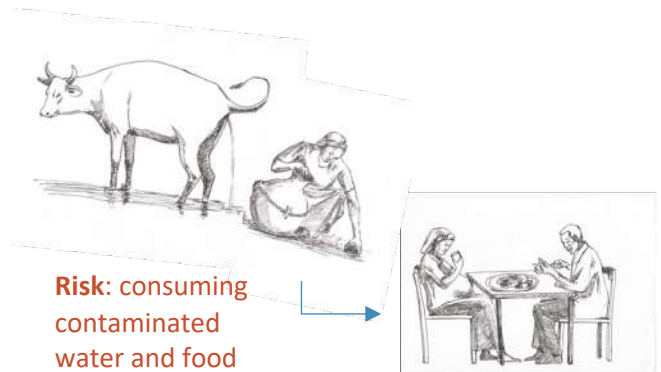
How can I prevent the disease in animals?

- Avoid running your livestock on poorly drained areas or paddocks which receive run off.
- Implement strict rodent control.

(Note that there is no vaccination program in Ethiopia)



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What can I do to protect myself and my family from leptospirosis?

- Separate animals from human habitat by fences and screens.
- Remove rubbish and keep areas around human habitat clean.
- Encourage your family not to leave food around, in areas where rats may be present.
- Always wear protective clothing when handling aborted fetus and afterbirth, or during assisting lambing/kidding.
- Practice good personal hygiene, such as always washing hands properly after contact with livestock.
- Avoid drinking water suspected of being contaminated or treat water before drinking.
- Avoid swimming in streams and other fresh watercourses at risk of contamination.

Contacts

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