

Leptospirosis – the need to know

<p>What is Leptospirosis?</p>	<p>Leptospirosis is a disease caused by bacteria (Leptospira) that can infect people and almost all mammals.</p> <p>In people, the <u>mild form</u> is a minor flu-like sickness.</p> <p>The <u>severe form</u> however causes very serious symptoms: Severe headaches, high fever, nausea, muscle pain, mood changes, jaundice, kidney damage and other symptoms.</p> <p>About half the people with the severe form are hospitalised. There can be permanent complications from kidney or liver damage. It takes a long time to recover. Infection can persist for a long time and is not cleared by immunity.</p> <p>Many animals are infected without symptoms, the Leptospira living in the kidneys and being shed in the urine</p>
<p>How do people catch it?</p>	<p>Bacteria enter the body through cuts and cracks in the skin and membranes of the eyes, nose and mouth.</p> <p>The bacteria is shed in the urine from infected animals (mice, rats, sheep, cattle deer, pets, hedgehogs, possums, rabbits).</p> <p>Farmers, vets, and meat workers are at highest risk from contact with infected urine or kidneys, and contaminated environments such as water and stored animal feed.</p>
<p>Can it be diagnosed?</p>	<p>Yes, but not easily. Because clinical symptoms just indicate a bad flu-like disease, a blood test is required.</p> <p>However, this test looks for antibodies which will not be present at the acute stage when the disease has just started, only 2-3 weeks later, often when symptoms are easing.</p>
<p>Can it be treated?</p>	<p>Once detected, effective treatment is available that usually kills and removes the bacteria.</p>
<p>Can people be vaccinated?</p>	<p>No, a suitable vaccine for people is not available. The only existing vaccine for people (in Cuba) has unacceptable side effects</p>
<p>So, how can Leptospirosis be prevented?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through protection against a urine-contaminated environment e.g. water, urine, pasture, hay and/or - The prevention of infection in animals that would contaminate the environment.
<p>Are Vaccines available?</p>	<p>Vaccines are available for cattle, sheep, deer, pigs and pets. The effectiveness of these vaccines has only been established for dairy cattle. Vaccinating animals is to prevent infection but animals often get infected very early in life, and once infected the vaccines are likely to only reduce shedding but they do not effectively remove the bacteria from animal's kidneys.</p>
<p>What we know:</p>	<p>That the disease is widespread in New Zealand: cattle, deer, sheep and many feral species are infected and shed Leptospira into the environment. We also know that meat workers are potentially exposed every day to carcasses shedding Leptospira in urine.</p>
<p>What we don't know</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often meat workers, farmers, vets etc. get infected • Whether human infection is linked to calving/lambing times, shearing or other animal handling • Whether the disease in animals and humans is seasonal • Whether sheep get infected from deer, cattle, wildlife and vice versa • Whether some types of bacteria cause more disease than others • Whether there is competition among the different types of Leptospira • More information about the available vaccines through testing including what age animals should be vaccinated to effectively prevent shedding.

More information at <http://www.osh.dol.govt.nz/order/catalogue/pdf/leptospirosisguide.pdf>



Leptospirosis – RWNZ fundraising campaign 2007

<p>The 2007 RWNZ Leptospirosis campaign</p>	<p>Rural Women New Zealand decided to re-launch a campaign to raise further funds for Leptospirosis research at its National Conference in Rotorua in 2007.</p> <p>This will be a one year fundraising campaign to raise funds for Massey University's Faculty of Veterinary Science to continue researching the disease.</p> <p>Funds will be raised through RWNZ branch projects and initiatives, and individual donations.</p> <p>Funds should be sent to "Rural Women New Zealand" at our national office PO Box 12-021, Wellington, marked "Leptospirosis Fund"</p>
<p>RWNZ's interest in Leptospirosis research</p>	<p>In the 1970s and 1980s Rural Women New Zealand members (then known as Women's Division Federated Farmers), raised approximately \$150,000 for research into vaccination and management regimes for the control of Leptospirosis in pigs and dairy cattle.</p> <p>Leptospirosis is still New Zealand's most commonly notified workplace disease. But the profile of those at risk has changed and we need to better understand why. Meat workers are now the most 'at risk' group, and more research is needed on the incidence in sheep and deer.</p>
<p>Past Successes</p>	<p>The Wdff fundraising of the 1970s and 80s assisted in the publication of 57 Leptospirosis research papers by the Massey University team.</p> <p>The research contributed to a significant drop in the number of notified cases in humans, from 875 cases in 1974 to under 200 in the early 1980s, primarily as a result of a vaccination programme in dairy cattle and pigs, as well as educational campaigns.</p>
<p>Further Information</p>	<p>For further information about the 2007 RWNZ fundraising campaign, contact:</p> <p>Noeline Holt, RWNZ Executive Officer, Noeline.holt@ruralwomen.org.nz (04) 473 5524, or</p> <p>Margaret Chapman, RWNZ National President, mqchapman@farmside.co.nz (03) 697 4869.</p>