

Please warn friends about Leptospirosis.

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Introduction

The Leptospirosis bacteria can infect and be carried by living or dead humans, cattle, deer, pigs, sheep, dogs, possums, rats, and mice, all of which can infect humans through touch. Animals and humans can be infected by bacteria from the urine of an infected animal, either through the mouth, eyes or a cut in the skin. Once in the body, the bacteria usually establish and multiply in the kidneys and can be excreted in the urine for years, which may infect others. Water sources can be contaminated by bacteria in urine from livestock, rodents and wildlife.

Recurr

If not cured, Leptospirosis can recur for many years causing fever, upset stomach and flu-like symptoms every two to three weeks, then clear up again until the next attack, which could be accentuated by some other infection. Two different severe infections (a double whammy) can put a life at risk, so never allow any infection to continue in your body. Swine flu is an example - healthy people hardly notice it, but those with other infections, babies and the elderly can suffer severely.

Just one drop of infected urine is all it takes to get Leptospirosis, warned Rural Women NZ President, Margaret Chapman. "Leptospirosis is New Zealand's most important occupationally acquired disease that poses a serious risk to meat workers, farmers and others," she said. "It affects livelihoods and can result in ongoing health problems, sometimes for life. In the worst cases it can kill, especially babies."

While 90% of dairy herds are now vaccinated and human cases now arise more frequently from other sources, dairy farmers, staff and others should still be very careful. A sharemilker caught the disease in 2011, despite the herd having been vaccinated. Another unnamed sharemilker collapsed and was unconscious, and thought he was going to die.

We got Leptospirosis

In October 2011, my wife Auriel and I were unwell and getting worse. We had all the known examinations, x-rays, scans and blood tests from doctors and some specialists, who found nothing. A visit to Dr Ricky Gorringer (read > Human Health Specialists) found that Auriel had canine Lepto, possibly from a friend's dog, and I had rodent Leptospirosis. Ricky told me that I got mine eight months prior from rats that came from the adjacent council bush and ate and ruined our sweet corn in March 2011. I cut it up and composted it, not knowing that rats carried Lepto. He cured us both, whereas some people carry it and suffer dreadfully for years. So when unwell, but not helped by doctors, remember to visit alternative specialists. Leptospirosis symptoms are a bit similar to gluten intolerance, so I thought my problem was a gluten one which I get because of the unreliability of some companies' lack of quality control, mistake or ignorance. One example affecting me was the capsule coating of a Bilberry capsule that contained gluten.

A year to recover

In 1976, a Golden Bay dairy farmer was struck down by Lepto. It took him a full year to recover and to regain his energy levels enough to work again. Around this time, Rural Women NZ (then WDFF) took up the fight against Lepto, raising large sums to fund research by Massey University into this bacterial illness.

The Massey University research resulted in the development of vaccines for cattle and pigs. The strong uptake of the vaccine in dairy herds led to a drop in reported human cases from 875 in 1974, to 55 in 1996. However, this figure increased again in 2002, with an average of 120 notified cases per year between 2002 and 2006, making Leptospirosis New Zealand's most important occupational infectious disease. Interestingly, the at-risk group has changed, with notified cases of dairy farmers dropping to 10%, other farmers 27% and meat workers to 38%.

A sheep and beef farmer - also from Golden Bay - was smitten by Lepto, though his suffering was shorter than the one above, thanks to prompt diagnosis. He suffered the symptoms for three days then went to the doctor, who recognised the possibility that he was suffering from Lepto and prescribed a course of strong antibiotics. He made a speedy recovery and in 10 days was well enough to work again. He later worked in a livestock sales yard in Canterbury, and said that there were signs up reminding people to be aware of Leptospirosis. However, he is concerned that while the older generation are likely to know about Lepto, today's generation may not. Please get your friends to read this chapter.