

Leptospirosis (Weil's disease)

Leptospirosis, also called Weil's disease, is an infection you can catch from animals. It's rare in the UK.

How you catch leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is spread in the urine of infected animals – most commonly rats, mice, cows, pigs and dogs.

You can catch it if:

- **soil or freshwater (such as from a river, canal or lake) containing infected pee gets in your mouth, eyes or a cut** – usually during activities like kayaking, outdoor swimming or fishing
- **you touch an infected animal's blood or flesh** – usually from working with animals or animal parts

It's very rare to get leptospirosis from pets, other people or bites.

See a GP if you might have been exposed to infected urine and you have:

- a very high temperature, or feel hot and shivery
- a headache
- feeling and being sick
- aching muscles and joints
- red eyes
- loss of appetite

These are symptoms of leptospirosis.

Ask for an urgent appointment if you have:

- yellow skin and eyes ([jaundice](#))
- swollen ankles, feet or hands
- chest pain
- shortness of breath
- coughing up blood

You might have a serious infection that needs to be treated quickly.

Treatment from a GP

Your GP may prescribe antibiotic tablets to treat the infection. You should make a full recovery in a few days or weeks.

It's important to finish the course of antibiotics, even if you start to feel better.

Take paracetamol or ibuprofen to relieve any aches, pains or fever.

If you have a more serious infection, you may need to be treated in hospital.

How to avoid getting leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is rare, especially in the UK. You're more at risk if you do lots of outdoor activities (especially while abroad) or work with animals or animal parts.

To reduce your chances of catching it:

Do

- wash your hands with soap and water after handling animals or animal products
- clean any wounds as soon as possible
- cover any cuts and grazes with waterproof plasters
- wear protective clothing if you're at risk through your job
- shower as soon as possible if you've been in potentially infected water
- check your dog is vaccinated against leptospirosis (there isn't a vaccine for people)

Don't

- touch dead animals with your bare hands
- drink water from places like rivers, canals or lakes that hasn't been boiled