

## Leptospirosis

**CAUSE:** Leptospirosis is a highly contagious bacterial infection, caused by bacteria from the subgroup *Leptospira interrogans*. Serovars hardjo, pomona, grippotyphosa and others have been associated with cattle.



Photo: Ken Hackman, ARS Image Gallery

**EFFECT:** In cattle, signs can range from mild (lowered milk and calf production) to severe (abortions, stillbirths, and liver damage). After infection, the bacteria localize in the kidneys or reproductive organs, and are shed in urine.

**How is Leptospirosis spread?** Leptospirosis is most commonly spread by contact with the urine of infected animals. It can also be transmitted by wildlife, such as rodents and birds.

**How can Leptospirosis be prevented?** Vaccinate cattle at least annually. Avoid contact with wildlife and prevent access to contaminated streams or ponds.

**Can Leptospirosis affect people?** Yes, humans are susceptible to all strains of the disease, though transmission requires close contact with the urine of infected animals. Thus, it is an occupational risk for farmers and veterinarians. Signs can range from mild to severe, and can be fatal if untreated, especially if renal or hepatic failure occurs. The most common symptoms are headaches, fever, rash, and malaise.

**What if there is an outbreak?** Antibiotic treatment early in the course of the disease can be successful. Vaccination in the face of an outbreak can limit the extent of the infection in a herd.

**For more information on Leptospirosis, see:**

[The Merck Veterinary Manual: Leptospirosis](#)

[Health & Safety Executive leaflet: Leptospirosis – Are You at Risk?](#)

[CDC: Leptospirosis](#)