

## Ref: 1-2018 Leptospirosis



### Introduction

Leptospirosis (often called Weil's disease) is a serious and sometimes fatal disease caused by bacteria of the genus *Leptospira*. The bacteria is found in the kidneys of infected rats (and other mammals, such as cattle), and is urinated out of the host animal. Infection of humans usually occurs following contact with fresh rat urine or water that has been urinated into. The bacteria enter the body through damaged skin and through the mucous membranes of the mouth.

Occupational at-risk groups include farmers (now the main group at risk for both Weil's disease and cattle leptospirosis), as well as abattoir, sewer, and construction workers. Workers in contact with canal and river water are also at risk.

### Stages of Leptospirosis infection

**Stage 1:** Fever with 'flu-like symptoms lasting for about a week. (It is for this reason that all workers at risk should carry an information card for presentation to their GP on the appearance of any 'flu-like symptoms, so that the possibility of the onset of Weil's disease may be considered). The symptoms can occur between 3 and 21 days from the time of infection.

**Stage 2:** By the start of the second week the fever has abated and jaundice becomes more obvious (sometimes making its appearance as early as the fourth day). More severe cases can lead to meningitis, kidney failure and other serious conditions. This toxic stage is the result of the development of antibodies in the blood and excretion of bacteria in the urine. Death can occur due to heart, liver or respiratory failure.

**Stage 3:** The convalescent period. In severe cases the jaundice may be present for three or four weeks and a second fever usually occurs lasting for up to two weeks. Recovery can take many weeks or months, with patients remaining very tired and lethargic for a considerable time.

### Preventive measures

- ✓ Cover cuts and broken skin (including open scratches, sores and skin affected by eczema) with waterproof plasters before and during work
- ✓ Wash cuts and grazes immediately with soap and running water
- ✓ Wear protective clothing, such as nitrile gloves and safety boots, and ensure that these are regularly cleaned or replaced
- ✓ Good hand washing after handling animals or contaminated material
- ✓ Good hand washing before eating, drinking or smoking, and after you have finished working (adequate facilities for hand washing, including antibacterial gels, should be available at all field sites)
- ✓ Early reporting of symptoms to a doctor
- ✓ Carrying the RSK alert card to provide additional information to the doctor about the risk



#### You **must not**:

- ✗ Encourage the presence of vermin. Keep sites tidy and dispose of all rubbish correctly
- ✗ Handle dead rats
- ✗ Wear contaminated clothing in food preparation or eating areas

**Any suspected or confirmed cases of Leptospirosis occurring within RSK must be promptly reported to the SHEQ Director.**

### How is the item to be cascaded and implemented?

Toolbox talk  Team briefing  SHEQ notice board  Process change  Supply chain   
SHE induction  Other