

E Safety – Toolbox Talk

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LEPTOSPIROSIS (WEILS DISEASE)

There are two types of leptospirosis infections that can affect workers within the UK:

Weil's disease – a serious and potentially fatal infection that is transmitted to humans by contact with urine from infected rats

Hardjo form of leptospirosis – Transmitted from cattle to humans.

The symptoms for both diseases start with an Influenza-like illness with a persistent and severe headache and possibly chills. Later symptoms can lead to vomiting, muscle pains and ultimately to jaundice, meningitis and kidney failure. In rare cases the disease can be fatal.

You are at risk if as part of your work you are likely to come into contact with rats, rats or cattle urine or to fetal fluids from cattle is at risk.

Q: How can you become infected?

The bacteria can enter your body through cuts and scratches and through the lining of the mouth, throat and eyes after contact with urine or contaminated water such as that in sewers, ditches, drains, ponds and slow flowing rivers and water ways.

Q: How can you prevent becoming infected?

- Don't encourage rats – dispose of all your rubbish correctly.
- Don't handle the carcasses of deceased rats without unprotected hands, whenever possible use a shovel or other tool.
- Avoid inadvertent entry or immersion into water that could be infected – If this happens or you ingest any water you suspect is infected see a doctor as a matter of urgency
- Wash cuts and grazes immediately with soap and running water and cover all cuts and broken skin with waterproof plasters both before and during work.
- Wear the protective equipment you are provided with.
- During work avoid rubbing your nose, mouth or eyes
- Wash your hands, forearms and all other exposed areas of skin thoroughly after completion of the task(s).
- Remove any wet protective clothing as soon as is possible
- Before eating and smoking and after handling contaminated clothing.

Q: What else can you do?

- Report any illness to your doctor.
- Inform your doctor about your work Leptospirosis is much less severe when treated promptly
- If your doctor confirms that you have contracted Leptospirosis YOU must inform your employer who will need to report it to the Incident Contact Centre

REMEMBER: Leptospirosis can be fatal typically within four to six weeks, if the early symptoms are not diagnosed and treated

