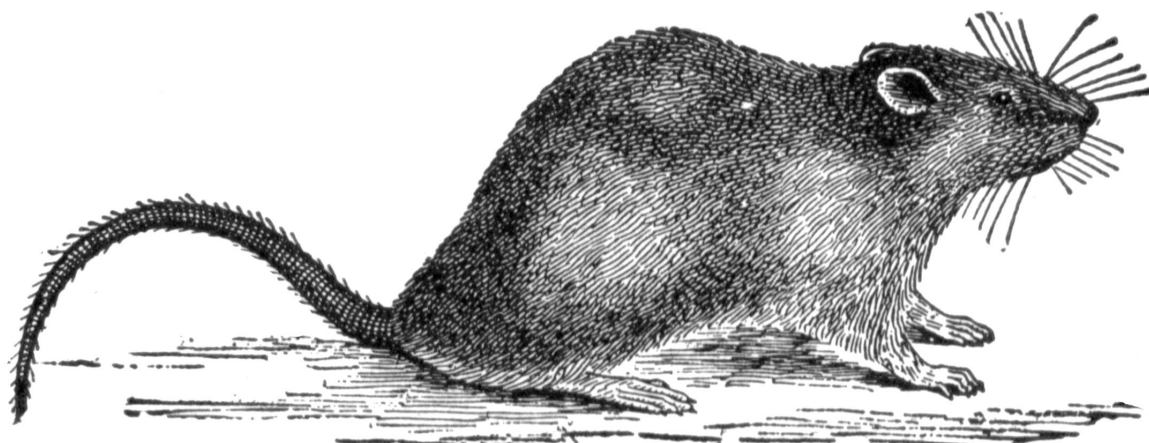


Leptospirosis and Weil's Disease Fact Sheet



What is it?

Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis) is a potentially fatal disease contracted by coming into contact with water contaminated with rat's, cattle's, or occasionally pig's, urine. It is most common in stagnant or slow moving water. The bacteria does not survive long in saline (salt) water or in dry conditions.

Who is at risk?

The most common carrier are rats, therefore areas with a high population of rats increases the risk. This usually includes farms, sewage treatment works and refuse disposal areas. Anyone working in water near these areas should be aware of the risk.

How is it caught?

The bacterium usually enters the body via cuts or scratches in the skin or via the lining of the eyes, nose or throat.

Incubation usually lasts for 3 – 21 days, although some cases have been as short as 48 hours or as long as 30 days.

Leptospirosis is thought to be the most common infection in the world, however only a very cases will become the severe life-threatening illness known as Weil's disease.

Symptoms

Symptoms include sudden fever, severe headache, chills, muscular aches and pains, loss of appetite and nausea. During the initial stages it may be mistaken for influenza, meningitis or fever. The infection becomes more violent in its later stages with symptoms such as bruising of the skin, sore eyes, anaemia, nosebleeds and jaundice. If these symptoms occur it is important to contact your doctor immediately, as occasionally the illness can lead to death.

How to prevent it.

- Cover all cuts with waterproof plasters
- wear waterproof/rubber gloves, if necessary
- always wear appropriate footwear to avoid cuts to feet
- avoid touching your face with your hands
- where possible, wash soon after the activity
- if in doubt, contact your doctor

For more information, see <http://www.leptospirosis.org/>
download the HSE fact sheet <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg84.pdf>