

Leptospirosis

Traveler Summary

Other terms for this disease are: canicola fever, hemorrhagic jaundice, infectious jaundice, mud fever, spirochetal jaundice, swamp fever, swineherd's disease, and Weil's disease.

Leptospirosis is an acute illness caused by leptospire (organisms of the group *Leptospira*). It occurs worldwide and most cases occur during or soon after rainy seasons. The disease is transmitted to humans through direct contact with contaminated water, soil, or animal urine (through contact with open skin or mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth).

Adventure travelers and persons who engage in hiking, biking, camping, swimming, boating, or other water sports in natural freshwater bodies are at risk for acquiring leptospirosis.

The incubation period ranges from 2 to 30 or more days, but most cases occur 5 to 14 days after exposure. The disease begins with chills, fever, headache, and muscular pain. Weil's disease, the most serious form of the infection, is identified by jaundice (yellowish pigmentation of the skin) and hemorrhage or bleeding in the skin and subcutaneous tissue. Death can occur.

The best prevention for serious adventure travelers is the use of doxycycline taken prophylactically. A health care provider can determine if this antibiotic is indicated for a given itinerary. In addition, travelers should avoid exposure to potentially contaminated water, soil, and mud (such as swimming or bathing in stagnant pools or sluggish streams). Travelers should also be aware of the dangers of urine contamination when befriending a stray animal and should carefully wash or avoid fresh vegetables grown in soil with suspected contamination.

Travelers with symptoms or those who suspect that they have been exposed should seek medical attention for treatment of symptoms and to avoid complications.

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