

Leptospirosis (Weil's Disease).

A disease of both man and animals. There are many types of the illness (eg. Rat, dog and cattle), with the most life threatening to humans being that which is carried by rats (*Leptospira interrogans* var *Icterohaemorrhagiae*).

THE ILLNESS.

The bacteria are harboured in the kidneys of the host animal (eg. Rat) and excreted into the environment. The bacteria then enter the patient's body through cuts / grazes, ingested (contaminated food & water), eyes, nose etc.

Once established, the illness affects the Liver, and prevents blood clotting, with the patient being susceptible to fatal haemorrhages from mucus membranes and internal organs. The illness may not develop for several days – up to 8 weeks after infection.

RISK FACTORS.

Infection must be of concern to all persons working in outdoor activities. Risk areas include watercourses, river banks, culverts, lake / river / reservoir / canal water, mines & railway tunnels, derelict buildings & barns, campsites, stables, rubbish dumps, sewage plants, manure heaps etc.

Statistically, persons involved in Outdoor Activities are only slightly at less risk than a farmer, and 10 times more prone to contracting the illness than a sewage worker.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS.

Flu-like illness, raised temperature, headache, meningitis, conjunctivitis. Pain, stiffness and paralysis of muscles. Jaundice. Liver & kidney failure. Mood swings. Bleeding from mucus membranes. The rat borne illness is fatal in 5 - 10% of patients.

MANAGEMENT OUTDOORS.

It cannot be too highly stressed the importance of receiving urgent medical attention if a person suspects the illness. Early diagnosis will allow effective use of antibiotics. Poor prognosis in an advanced condition. No vaccination is available.

Immediately clean all wounds thoroughly. Use waterproof dressings. Irrigate eyes, nose & mouth if contaminated. If thorough treatment cannot be achieved, refer to hospital.

There is an urban myth that drinking flat Pepsi or Coke kills the bacteria & prevents infection via the gut. Given the chemicals in these products it may have some virtues – but is not medically proven and should not be relied upon ☺

AVOIDANCE.

Cover all existing wounds with a waterproof dressing before commencing the activity. Normal waterproof clothing is an effective barrier. Avoid eating / smoking with contaminated hands. Wash thoroughly after the activity.

** If acquired in the course of work, the illness must immediately be reported to the HSE.