

The Risk of Leptospirosis



Controlling leptospirosis by vaccination has historically been an acceptable way of preventing lepto in humans. However vaccination only minimises the risk and there are other things which increase the risk of you contracting human lepto that we need to be sure you are aware of.

Rising rates of human infection have made it clear that further steps are needed to reduce the risk of people becoming infected. Basic hygiene and care when handling animals are essential, and reducing cattle contact with potential sources of infection is also helpful. Most importantly, every person on farm needs to be regularly educated about the severity of leptospirosis, and how to reduce their own risk of infection.

To minimise the risk of you contracting leptospirosis and provide you with the best service we can, we need to ensure we are passing this information on to you and all your staff members.

What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can spread from animals to humans. Many species can be infected, including cattle, pigs, rodents, dogs and humans. Affected dairy cattle may abort (occasionally resulting in abortion storms) or may show no outward signs of infection.

How do you catch leptospirosis?

From exposure to the urine or aborted material from infected animals.

The infection most commonly enters through cuts or grazes on the skin or through the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose and mouth.

If an infected animal gets vaccinated she will continue to shed lepto; a carrier will continue to shed lepto despite vaccination. For this reason animals need to be vaccinated at a young age BEFORE they get infected with leptospire from the environment to offer full protection to you and your staff.

Leptospire thrive in moist conditions. Both humans and animals can be infected by contact with contaminated water.

What happens if you are infected with leptospirosis?

There are several forms of the disease, ranging from mild flu-like symptoms to severe fever, light sensitivity, liver damage, vomiting, severe headaches and kidney failure.

Many people are forced to give up work because the disease is so debilitating.

Many people require hospitalisation.

Long lasting effects occur when people suffer kidney or liver damage and people can die of this disease.



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How to prevention human infection

1. Vaccination of animals reduces the risk to humans, but does not eliminate it.
2. Basic hygiene must always be practiced.
3. Avoid contact with urine, such as splashes in the shed.
4. Cover cuts with waterproof plasters.
5. Wash hands with disinfectant.
6. Avoid contact between hands and eyes/mouth during milkings.
7. No smoking, eating or drinking in the shed.
8. Wear gloves and aprons during risky procedures, such as milking, calvings or RFMs.
9. Be especially careful around aborting cows and aborted material.

Other risk factors

Pigs and rodents can be a source of infection for both cattle and humans. Ideally pigs should not be on dairy farms. If pigs are kept they should be vaccinated (at 6 monthly intervals) and should come from leptospirosis free piggeries, or be treated with antibiotics on arrival.

- Rodent control, especially around feed, will reduce risk.
- Effluent and waterways are also risks. Contact with these should be reduced by effective fencing.

“In the first week I thought I would die, and then I wished I had. It took a whole year out of my life, and the worst thing about it, is once you’ve got it, it doesn’t go away.”

Pig farmer who caught leptospirosis

I have read and understood this information – what do I do now?

- ✓ Pass the information to all staff on farm.
- ✓ Complete a Leptospirosis Risk Management Appraisal with your Anexa vet.
- ✓ Implement and maintain a leptospirosis vaccination programme and ongoing risk management training with staff.

Ideal Vaccination Schedule for a Spring Calving Herd:

(If you run a split or autumn calving system, please contact your vet)

	Sept/Oct	Oct/Nov	May/June
Calf (R1)	1st vax: when youngest replacement heifer is 4 weeks old	2nd vax: 4 weeks later	3rd vax: autumn/winter, at or shortly after your herd is vaccinated
Heifer (R2)			Yearly booster: With herd, around dry-off
Herd			Yearly booster: At/ around Dry-off

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