



Leptospirosis in Puerto Rico

FACT SHEET 91-002-1017

All U.S. Army Soldiers and Civilian personnel assisting with disaster recovery operations in Puerto Rico should be aware that Leptospirosis is a disease present on the island. This disease is most commonly acquired through contact with water or soil contaminated by the urine of infected animals. Direct contact with an infected animal, wild or domestic (livestock, cats and dogs), can also result in illness. In order to reduce the risk of becoming infected, avoid prolonged contact with surface/standing water, cover cuts and scrapes, and do not swim in flood waters.

How do I get Leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is caused by bacteria that can spread to humans by contact with infected animals or, more commonly, by contact with water or soil that has been contaminated by the urine of infected animals.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include an abrupt onset of high fever, chills, headache, skin rashes, body aches in the calf and abdomen, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Symptoms usually appear 5-14 days after exposure but can take up to 30 days to develop.

How can I protect myself from this disease?

- avoid unnecessary prolonged contact with all surface/standing water
- limit water contact in the performance of duties, if possible
- wash with soap and clean water as soon as possible after contact; launder uniform before wearing again
- do not swim in flood waters; avoid flooded areas if at all possible
- only drink water that is known to be safe

If you must enter a flooded area, cover open cuts or scratches and try to avoid getting water into your mouth or eyes.

Is there a treatment for this disease?

Yes, antibiotics are usually recommended following laboratory confirmation of the illness.

What should I do when I go back home after working in Puerto Rico?

Seek medical attention if you experience the symptoms listed above. Be sure to tell your health care provider you were supporting disaster recovery in Puerto Rico.