



What Is Leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection caused by *Leptospira* spp., which thrive in wet environments. They can enter a horse's body through direct contact with mucous membranes, such as the eyes, nostrils, or mouth, and skin abrasions. Once circulating in the blood, the bacteria can invade other organs and cause abortion, chronic uveitis, and kidney failure.

Leptospirosis is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can be transmitted from animals to humans. While it's more common in areas with high rainfall or flooding, any horse in contact with contaminated water or environments is at risk.



Clinical Signs

Once infected, a horse might not show clinical signs of leptospirosis for up to three weeks. These signs can range from mild to severe and include:

- Fever, particularly in the first two to 20 days post-exposure to *Leptospira*.
- Placentitis or abortion in pregnant mares.
- Weakness and lethargy.
- Reduced appetite.
- Tearing, swelling, discharge, or

cloudiness of the eyes, indicative of equine recurrent uveitis (ERU).

- Kidney or liver failure (signs include jaundice, lethargy, fever), which left untreated can result in death.



Diagnosis

Your veterinarian will use a combination of clinical signs and diagnostic tests to confirm leptospirosis. Blood tests can detect the presence of antibodies against *Leptospira* or signs of liver or kidney damage. PCR testing can confirm the bacteria's presence in urine, ocular fluids, and/or fluids from aborted fetuses. Veterinarians might also perform eye exams.

It's important to note that *Leptospira* bacteria can be difficult to detect in some cases, and a diagnosis might require specialized laboratory testing.



Treatment and Management

If your horse is diagnosed with leptospirosis, timely treatment is crucial. Veterinarians prescribe antimicrobials for acute cases involving the kidney or placenta. Antimicrobial therapy is not effective, however, for

cases of ERU.

Horses might require supportive care (e.g., fluid therapy, anti-inflammatory medications) to manage clinical signs and in severe cases hospitalization for more intensive care. It's important to monitor these horses closely throughout treatment and perform follow-up testing to ensure the infection has cleared.

It's important to remember that leptospirosis can be transmitted to humans. Isolate infected horses, wear gloves and protective clothing when handling them, and avoid contact with their urine or bodily fluids.



When to Call Your Vet

Contact your veterinarian:

- If your horse has a fever or shows any of the above signs of leptospirosis.
- If your horse's condition worsens or fails to improve with treatment.
- If your horse is at risk of exposure to *Leptospira* so your veterinarian can administer the risk-based vaccine that might help prevent disease.
- To perform regular eye exams in the case of ERU.
- If your horse is experiencing ocular pain and inflammation secondary to ERU