



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

News Release

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**DOH ADVISES THE PUBLIC TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT
EXPOSURE TO LEPTOSPIROSIS INFECTION**

HONOLULU – Due to yesterday’s heavy rainfall and flooding, the Hawai’i State Department of Health is advising the public to take precautions when coming in contact with flood waters because of possible increased risk of leptospirosis infection. Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease caused by *Leptospira* bacteria spread through the urine of infected animals such as rodents, wild pigs, dogs, and livestock. The bacteria can contaminate freshwater and mud and can enter a person’s body through the mouth, nose, eyes, and cuts or open wounds. Persons who must be in freshwater during this time (for example, flood damage cleanup), should cover all open wounds with waterproof dressings, wear protective gear such as gloves, boots, waders, aprons, goggles, and/or heavy pants, and wash skin with soap and water after exposure.

“Because leptospirosis is endemic in our freshwater streams in Hawai’i, heavy rains especially related to flooding and overflowing waterways increase the risk of exposure to leptospirosis bacteria,” said Dr. Sarah Park, chief of the DOH Disease Outbreak Control Division. “We did see two cases of illness from leptospirosis after the heavy flooding in Manoa in October 2004.”

Symptoms of leptospirosis can include fever, chills, headache, muscle pain, body aches, and vomiting. These flu-like symptoms generally appear 7 to 14 days after contact with contaminated fresh water and can result in mild to severe illness. Without treatment, in some cases, leptospirosis may lead to hospitalization or death. It is recommended that people with these symptoms see their doctor right away and tell the doctor about any recent contact with freshwater or animals.

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For additional information on leptospirosis go to the Department of Health website at:
<http://hawaii.gov/health/about/reports/leptobrochure.pdf>.

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