Agriculture & Investment Services
Tapuwae Ahuwhenua
Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua

Notification: Increased risk of leptospirosis infections in animals

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This notification is to inform you and the organisations that you represent that there is a likelihood of an increased risk of leptospirosis infections in animals and humans.

Background: As per actions from the joint Cyclone Gabrielle and Endemic Diseases Forum (EDF) meeting, the MPI Animal Health (Endemics) team was tasked with monitoring endemic diseases that could increase post flooding through our passive animal health surveillance system. Leptospirosis was one of those diseases.

Current situation: The post-cyclone animal health surveillance data which mostly focuses on production animals, has not shown an increase in the number of confirmed leptospirosis submissions. These notifications are received from commercial laboratories and reflect the number of samples submitted for testing by private veterinarians. However, ESR human health leptospirosis data has shown an increase in human leptospirosis cases post-cyclone. A significant increase in human leptospirosis cases is a sentinel event and signals that the bacteria is circulating in animals, as humans are infected directly or indirectly (e.g. through flood water) through contact with infected animals' urine.

Apart from the surveillance evidence of increased human cases, there has been heightened talk among the veterinary profession of increased observations, and treatment of leptospirosis cases in dogs and sheep. The focus has been on increased cases in the flood affected areas (Hawkes Bay and Tairāwhiti Gisborne), however, discussions indicate that the problem maybe be more widespread. This is anecdotal evidence at this stage; however, we have called on a consortium of professionals who agree that there is a high likelihood of increased animal leptospirosis infections following increased wet weather, which was exacerbated by Cyclone Gabrielle and increased rodent vectors in the recovery phase.

Actions: The MPI Animal Health team together with Massey University, the NZVA and the VCNZ are working towards increasing awareness about leptospirosis in animals, case numbers, the disease, treatment, and preventative vaccinations. This will be distributed through various channels, with the EDF being one of those channels.

If you have any questions or queries in the interim, please feel free to contact the MPI Animal Health team via email, phone or through our inbox Endemic@mpi.govt.nz.