

Canecutter's disease on the rise among travellers: study

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(PhysOrg.com) -- University of Queensland research has shown "canecutter's" disease is a growing problem for travellers.

A team led by PhD researcher Dr Colleen Lau from the School of Population Health, has discovered the disease, known medically as leptospirosis, was traditionally a concern for males working in the agricultural and livestock industries, as it is contracted from contact with the urine of host animals.

Ms Lau said recreational exposure and international travel have emerged as increasingly important sources of infection over the past decade.

“Many of the areas with a high incidence of leptospirosis are popular destinations for domestic and international travellers,” Dr Lau said.

“With the increasing popularity of ecotourism and outdoor adventure activities, travellers are likely to become increasingly exposed through activities that involve contact with freshwater, soil and animals.”

Leptospirosis causes influenza-like symptoms such as fever, chills, headache and jaundice but can lead to more serious illness including [kidney failure](#), [liver failure](#), lung haemorrhage, brain infections, and can occasionally be fatal.

Called canecutter's disease in Queensland due to the spread of the disease by canefield rats, the study, published in the journal Travel

Medicine and Infectious Disease, has opened up a new way of looking at the spread of the disease.

As an under-diagnosed cause of fever in adventure seekers and returned travellers, Dr Lau and her co-authors, Professor Phil Weinstein and Lee Smythe, urged clinicians to change their perceptions of the population at risk of contracting leptospirosis, even if they do not fit the mould of a male agricultural worker.

“Early recognition, diagnosis, and treatment will reduce the incidence of severe illness and deaths,” she said.

Known high-risk areas for leptospirosis include tropical and subtropical regions such as Queensland, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, parts of South East Asia and the Caribbean.

Dr Lau is working in one such island, American Samoa, to complete her PhD on an analysis of risk factors for contracting leptospirosis.

Provided by University of Queensland

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