From the CDSC

Leptospirosis in man, British Isles: 1984

During 1984, 90 cases of leptospirosis were confirmed by the *Leptospira* Reference Unit compared with 120 cases in 1983 and 61 in 1982. Two patients died. Of the 75 indigenous cases, 47 patients contracted the infection in England, five in Wales, four in Scotland, seven in Northern Ireland, and 12 in the Republic of Ireland. Fifteen infections were thought to have been contracted abroad; of these, six were in soldiers, five were in members of a caving expedition to Borneo, and the four others were sporadic cases.

All infections except one were in adults (table I); 77 of the 85

adults whose age was stated were in the working age group 15-64. Only seven infections occurred in women, two of whom were farmers' wives.

The most common infective serogroups were *icterohaemorrhagiae* and *hebdomadis*, which accounted for 77% of reported cases, as in 1983. Thirty two patients were infected with *hebdomadis* (all serogroup *hardjo*); 21 of these had had contact with infected cattle herds, three had been on the caving expedition to Borneo, one had been infected while canoeing, and a further six were farm workers

TABLE I—Cases of leptospirosis classed by age

Serogroup	Age (years)							Not stated	Total
	≤14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	≥65		
<i>Icterohaemorrhagiae</i>	—	11*	3	6**	5	5	5	2	37
<i>Hebdomadis (hardjo)</i>	—	5	7**	11*	1	2	4	2	32
<i>Canicola</i>	—	2	1	3*	—	—	—	—	6
Other	—	4****	1*	3***	—	—	—	—	8
Not determined	1	1	2	2	—	1	—	—	7
Total	1	24	12	26	6	8	9	4	90

*Case infected abroad.

TABLE II—Occupations and risk factors for patients with leptospirosis

Occupation/risk factor	<i>Icterohaemorrhagiae</i>	<i>Hebdomadis (hardjo)</i>	<i>Canicola</i>	Other or not determined	Total
Dairy or cattle farming	1	18	—	—	19
Fish farmer	2	—	—	—	2
Farm work (other/unspecified)	7	6	—	1	14
Other livestock contact*	1	3	—	—	4
Contact with natural waters	13	1	—	3	17
Caving	—	3	—	2	5
Rats	5	—	—	—	5
Soldiers	2	—	—	4	6
Dogs	—	—	5	—	5
Sewer worker	—	—	—	1	1
Miscellaneous/not stated/unemployed	6	1	1	4	12
Total	37	32	6	15	90

*Auctioneer, abattoir worker, veterinarian, butcher.

(table II). The number of *icterohaemorrhagiae* infections (37) remained the same as in the previous year.¹ There were 10 infections in farm workers, one in a butcher, and two in soldiers; there was a history of contact with rats, not specifically associated with occupation, in five other cases. Contact with dogs, including two animals shown to be infected, was recorded in five of the six *canicola* cases. In all, 17 patients gave a history of immersion in contaminated water—five canoeists and 12 others (of whom two died) who fell or swam in water. Of the 15 infections contracted abroad, seven were in the Seychelles (four *autumnalis*, one *canicola*, one *icterohaemorrhagiae*, and one *tarassovi*), three in Barbados (two *icterohaemorrhagiae*, one *autumnalis*), and five in Borneo (three *hardjo*, two *pyrogenes*).

The disease showed a well defined seasonal pattern, with most indigenous cases occurring from July to December, as in previous years. Fifty cases were reported during this period, with peaks in November (16) and December (11). A few more cases than usual occurred in January and February, most of them *icterohaemorrhagiae* associated with contact with rats by farm workers. *Hardjo* infections, which used to be predominantly autumnal, were reported throughout the year.

Of the 37 patients with *icterohaemorrhagiae* infections, 25 had both jaundice and renal failure, and of these, seven also had meningitis; two had jaundice, one with meningitis; four had renal failure; three had meningitis only; and in three the symptoms were not stated. *Hardjo* infections appeared to be less severe: one of the 32 patients had meningitis and 29 had influenza-like symptoms, which were associated in seven with meningitis, in two with meningitis and jaundice, in one with jaundice, and in one with renal failure; in the remaining two cases the symptoms were not stated. The symptoms recorded in the *canicola* infections—a 'flu like illness followed by meningitis—were characteristic of the serogroup.

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Reference

- 1 Leptospira Reference Unit and PHLS Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (Public Health Laboratory Service). Leptospirosis in man, British Isles, 1983. *Br Med J* 1984;288:1984-5.