

Diseases in Springtime

In Southland, during springtime, there is a marked increase in some diseases which people can catch from animals, in particular the common diseases of campylobacter and salmonella.

This is caused to some degree by increased human contact with animals during lambing and calving. Symptoms of these two diseases include abdominal pain, diarrhoea, headache, fever and sometimes vomiting.

To become infected with one of these diseases a person basically has to swallow the micro-organism that causes it. Not a very nice thought is it?! This can be done in a variety of ways (for example, by drinking contaminated water), but in the context of lambing and calving, transmission is by hand-to-mouth or hand-to-food contact after handling infected animals or aborted material.

The most important thing you can do, to prevent catching one of these diseases, is to thoroughly wash your hands after handling animals or aborted material. Avoid hand-to-mouth (for instance, through smoking or wiping your face) and hand-to-food contact during lambing and calving activities - unless your hands have been thoroughly washed first.

Also avoid taking contaminated clothing into the house. Overalls and gumboots should be left outside.

Listeria is an extremely serious disease for pregnant women and newborn babies. One way of becoming infected with this disease is as described above, so it is best that pregnant women and new mothers do not get involved with lambing or calving activities. They should especially avoid any contact with aborted animal foetuses and sick or dead animals.

If you need any further information, please contact an Environmental Health Officer.