

Australia | March 14, 2021

Australia's devastating mouse plague has been laid bare in a 'gut-wrenching' photo showing about a dozen rodents dead in a rural resident's tank that supplies their drinking water.

Louise Hennessy uncovered the 'horrifying' sight when she went to inspect her water tank filter at her property on Thursday at Elong Elong in the New South Wales central west - a region where mice have been ravaging crops.

Ms Hennessey posted an image of the dead mice and clumps of fur tangled in the filter to social media as



health authorities begged residents to take precautions to protect themselves against the potentially fatal disease leptospirosis.

The disease is spread from animals to humans by bacteria found in infected animal urine and tissues and is most commonly reported in Australia when the country is the grips of a mouse plague.

'I cleaned this one week ago and took out handfuls of mice fur that was clumped together. Please check your tank filters and clean them. Be safe everyone,' she posted.

She turned to NSW Health for help, who then advised her how to disinfect the tank to ensure water would be safe for the family to drink.

Hunter New England Public Health last month warned residents about leptospirosis after an increase in rats and mice attributed to the wet weather throughout summer.

'While leptospirosis is a relatively rare condition in Australia, most cases are reported from rural and regional areas, often because of mouse plagues,' HNEPH Physician Dr David Durrheim said.

'Outbreaks of the disease usually occur following exposure to water, soil and mud that has been contaminated with infected animal urine, especially rodent urine. The bacteria can enter the body through skin cuts or abrasions, the lining of the mouth, nose, and eyes – and in rare cases through contaminated food and water.'

'The mice have continued to breed through the spring, into the summer and now the real concern is that they'll continue to breed into the autumn and cause a lot of trouble for the sowing of winter crops (in March/April),' CSIRO mouse researcher Steve Henry told AAP.

'You can force a farmer to do something about rabbits or foxes but because they're all-pervasive when in high numbers, everywhere you turn there's a mouse... it's just impossible to get on top of them.