

Canine Leptospirosis

Frequently Asked Questions for Dog Owners



What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a disease caused by spiral-shaped bacteria called leptospires. It can affect people as well as many wild and domestic animals, including dogs. The bacteria thrive in moist environments and in water. It can be spread through the urine of infected animals.

How can dogs get leptospirosis?

Dogs become infected by coming into contact with urine of infected animals. Infected wild and domestic animals excrete the bacteria into the environment. Many different types of environments in both rural and urban areas can be contaminated such as lakes, streams, puddles, vegetation, and mud. Even fenced yards can be contaminated by rodents, squirrels, or raccoons.

What animals spread leptospirosis?

Many wild animals carry the bacteria without getting sick. These animals include rodents like rats, mice, and squirrels, as well as raccoons, skunks, opossums, foxes, and deer.

What are the signs of leptospirosis in dogs?

The clinical signs of leptospirosis vary. Common clinical signs reported in dogs include fever, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea, refusal to eat, severe weakness and depression, stiffness, or severe muscle pain.

What should I do if I think my dog has leptospirosis?

Contact your veterinarian immediately. Your veterinarian can perform tests to detect the presence of leptospiral antibodies or bacteria in your pet.

Can my dog be treated for leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is treatable. Early treatment with antibiotics under direction of your veterinarian increases the chances of your dog's recovery.

Can my other pets get leptospirosis?

Although many animals can potentially become infected, other household pets, cats in particular, are less likely to get leptospirosis.

Can I get leptospirosis from my dog?

Yes. The bacteria that cause leptospirosis can be spread from dogs to people. This, however, does not often happen. People become infected with the bacteria the same way that dogs do—direct contact with an environment contaminated with the urine of infected animals. Usually this happens when people's outdoor activities—swimming and wading—bring them into contact with contaminated water in lakes, streams, and swamps.

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What are the symptoms of leptospirosis in people?

The time between a person's exposure to a contaminated source and becoming sick is a few days to several weeks. Signs of illness include fever, headache, chills, and body aches, particularly in the legs. If you develop symptoms, see your health care provider. Inform the health care provider about your dog's infection and possible contact with contaminated environments.

How can I protect myself and others when my dog has leptospirosis?

- Clean surfaces that may be contaminated by urine from an infected dog—wear gloves and use antibacterial cleaning solution or a solution of 1 part household bleach in 10 parts water and disposable paper towels to clean.
- Block off an outdoor area where your dog can urinate separate from areas used by your family to play, eat, or garden.
- **Always wash your hands** after handling your dog or anything that might have your dog's urine on it.

For more information on leptospirosis in people, see Centers of Disease Control and Prevention's Web site at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/leptospirosis_g.htm.

How can I prevent leptospirosis in my dog?

- Keep rodent problems (rats, mice, or other animal pests) under control. Rodents and other wildlife can carry and spread the bacteria.
 - Avoid feeding wildlife around your home
 - Don't approach wildlife
 - Store pet food in containers with tight fitting covers
 - Remove any uneaten dog food, and keep food and water bowls clean
- Get your dog vaccinated against leptospirosis. The vaccine, however, does not provide 100 percent protection. This is because there are many strains (types) of the bacteria, and the vaccine does not provide immunity against all strains. It is important to get your dog vaccinated even if it has had leptospirosis. Your dog can still become infected by a different strain of the bacteria.