

Fast facts about leptospirosis in dogs

- All dogs are at risk for contracting leptospirosis, a potentially serious infection.
- Leptospirosis may be subtle, showing no signs at all. If signs do emerge, it can cause severe illness and organ failure.
- Early detection and treatment of infection is important for giving your dog the best prognosis possible.
- Leptospirosis can be treated with antibiotics and, with precautions, you can reduce the risk of infection for others in your household.

Learn more

Visit PetHealthNetwork.com for more information on your dog's health and leptospirosis.



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Leptospirosis and Dogs:

What Is It and Why Should I Care?

What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a disease that impacts dogs, farm animals, wild animals, and even people. It's caused by infection with *Leptospira* bacteria, which can be found worldwide in soil and water that has been contaminated with infected urine.

How might my dog be exposed to leptospirosis?

Every dog is at risk of developing leptospirosis, regardless of whether they live in the country, suburbs, or city. Common risk factors include:

- Exposure to or drinking from puddles, rivers, lakes, or streams.
- Exposure to wild animal or farm animal species that may pass infected urine, even in your own backyard.
- Contact with rodents, such as rats or squirrels, or other dogs (such as in urban areas, dog parks, or multiple-dog working facilities).

How can I prevent my dog from getting leptospirosis?

Ask your veterinarian about the risks and benefits of a yearly vaccine that can decrease the likelihood of your dog developing leptospirosis.

How will I know if my dog has leptospirosis?

Your veterinarian will work with you to determine your dog's risk of contracting leptospirosis and will likely recommend a variety of diagnostic tests to determine whether your dog has the infection. If your dog is showing signs of the disease, your veterinarian may also recommend starting treatment before a diagnosis is confirmed, because of the possible severity of the disease if left untreated.

What are the signs of leptospirosis?

While many dogs show no signs at all, common signs may include the following:

- Decreased appetite or not eating
- Fever
- Increased drinking and urination
- Muscle pain, stiffness, reluctance to move
- Weakness and depression
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Conjunctivitis (red eyes)
- Dyspnea (difficulty breathing) or coughing
- Jaundice
- Organ failure (kidney or liver failure)

What if my dog has leptospirosis?

If your dog is displaying signs of the disease, be sure to contact your veterinarian as soon as possible. Early treatment and diagnosis are important as the disease can lead to severe illness or organ failure if left untreated.

Your veterinarian will work with you to identify the best course of treatment to help your dog, including possible supportive care, hospitalization (if needed), and treatment of your dog's specific symptoms. Your veterinarian may also suggest treating any other dogs in your household proactively, since they could have been exposed to the same contagion as your infected dog.

It's important to complete the course of prescribed antibiotics to ensure that the infection is properly eliminated. Be sure to bring your dog back for all recommended follow-up testing per your veterinarian.

If my dog has leptospirosis, can I catch it?

Yes. Leptospirosis is a zoonotic disease, meaning that it can be transmitted to people from animals. Like pets, humans can also catch leptospirosis from contaminated water sources, livestock, and wild animals. Most outbreaks of leptospirosis in humans result from exposure to contaminated water.¹

While there's a decreased risk of transmission from dogs on antibiotic therapy, it's important to take precautions—avoid direct contact with urine and wash your hands after petting your dog.

People with leptospirosis may exhibit a variety of symptoms, including flu-like symptoms that may lead to liver or kidney disease. If you have any symptoms of illness, particularly if you're pregnant or have a suppressed immune system, contact a physician. Visit cdc.gov/leptospirosis to learn more about leptospirosis in people.

5 simple tips for avoiding exposure during your dog's treatment

1. Avoid direct contact with your dog's urine until the course of antibiotics is completed.
2. Wash your hands thoroughly after handling your dog and his bedding, food, and water bowls.
3. Wear gloves and use a veterinarian-recommended disinfectant to clean up any urine-contaminated areas (in the house and outside).
4. Minimize contact between your pet and anyone who is pregnant or has a compromised immune system until the course of antibiotics is finished.
5. If you experience flu-like or any other symptoms, consult your family physician—especially if you're pregnant or have a suppressed immune system.

Reference

1. Leptospirosis: infection. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. www.cdc.gov/leptospirosis/infection/index.html. Accessed September 18, 2015.

