

Ask A Vet: Leptospirosis is Dangerous and Preventable

Sunday, October 23, 2016

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

My neighbor's dog was recently diagnosed with Leptospirosis and eventually died. What can I do to protect my dogs from this disease?

Dear Reader,

Leptospirosis is a disease caused by a Spirochete bacteria and can indeed lead to serious sometimes fatal disease in dogs as well as many other species. It is what we call a zoonotic infection or one that can pass between animals and people. This bacterial infection is often carried in the urine of wild animals particularly rodents. It survives easily in fresh water and thus can be spread in puddles, streams, or flooded areas dogs often drink from. Since mice, rats, raccoons ect often live near or around people there is a constant risk for exposure whether you are in an urban or rural setting. This risk is always greatest around times of flooding.

The bacteria most commonly attacks the kidneys, liver, and central nervous system but can cause a long list of symptoms in almost every body system. In dogs the most common symptoms are fever, decreased appetite, dehydration, and reluctance to move. Your veterinarian can diagnose the infection based on symptoms and a positive blood test. If your dogs symptoms are not too severe, the infection can be treated with antibiotics and supportive care. However, your dog may then become a carrier for months to years after recovery.

Fortunately, we do have effective vaccines available for the prevention of Leptospirosis. There has been some debate over the necessity of routine Leptospirosis vaccination for all dogs. This is primarily due to the historically increased risk of reactions to the vaccine. But, over the years manufacturers have continually improved these vaccines in both safety and efficacy. At this point they are quite safe for all sizes of dogs and shown to provide protection for at least one year. Because we cannot control the potential shedding of this bacteria around your dog, vaccination is the only true protection we can provide against this potentially deadly disease. If you have questions about Lepto or having your dog vaccinated, please consult your veterinarian.

-Dr. Justin Sellon