

Ask the Vet



Jill K. Clark, DVM

Dr. Jill K. Clark is a graduate of Page High School here in Greensboro. In 1993, she received a Bachelor of Science degree in Biochemistry from Denison University in Granville, Ohio. She then attended North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine where she earned her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine in 1998. Her special interests include geriatrics and feline medicine.

Leptospirosis

Q What is Leptospirosis and Its Treatment? Can Humans Contract This from Animals?

A Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection that can affect various species of animals including dogs, humans and various wild-life species. Cats are rarely infected, but on some occasions they can contract the infection.

The bacteria is shed in the urine of infected animals and can survive in temperate fresh water for six months or more. Dogs are most often exposed due to environmental contamination of water or soil from wildlife. The wildlife that most commonly expose humans, include rodents, raccoons, opossums and buffaloes. Domestic animals such as dogs, swine, cattle, goats, sheep, and horses are other sources for human infection. This disease is present throughout the world, including the southeastern United States. The Centers for Disease Control finds dogs in both rural and urban areas are at risk for infection.

Once an animal is infected, the bacteria can travel through the bloodstream and infect various organs. Infection ranges from sub clinical, meaning no symptoms, to life threatening. Most often in dogs, it causes liver or kidney failure. Symptoms can include fever, lethargy, cough, poor appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, increase in thirst and urination and yellowing of the skin and membranes. Infected animals, including dogs, also serve as a reservoir for infection in humans. Leptospirosis infection in humans cause similar symptoms and can also be fatal. Humans who are considered at highest risk for infection include farmers, mine workers, sewage plant workers, slaughter house workers, veterinary or animal caretakers, fishermen, military personal and those involved in outdoor freshwater activities.

If Leptospirosis is suspected, there is a blood test that can confirm infection. Because the infection is bacterial, it is treated by use of the appropriate antibiotic and with supportive care. Dogs have a good chance of recovering as long as it's diagnosed and treated early.

There are effective vaccinations for dogs available in the

United States. It is recommended for dogs to receive an initial set of two vaccinations three weeks apart followed by annual boosters. If you have questions about whether your dog should be vaccinated against Leptospirosis, you should speak to your veterinarian.

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