

Importance of Leptospirosis Vaccinations

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Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease caused by infection with the *Leptospira* spirochete. This bacterial infection has zoonotic potential which means it has the ability to be transmitted from animals to people and vice versa; thus, making this disease of great significance both for animals and humans alike.



Leptospirosis is mainly transmitted by contact with the infected urine. The bacteria can penetrate broken or bruised skin as well as intact mucous membranes it can then enter the bloodstream. Infection can also occur through exposure to infected rodents, wildlife or livestock or areas where there is flooding, standing water or raw sewage. Organs affected include the kidneys, spleen, liver, eyes and central nervous system to name a few.

Signs of illness can vary from asymptomatic to sudden death due to high levels of the bacteria in the blood. Other non-specific signs include, lethargy, anorexia, vomiting, increased thirst and urination as well as icterus (yellowing of mucous membranes-eyes, ears, gums etc). Most human infections are asymptomatic or mild, flu-like symptoms that resolve on its own but can also lead to death if proper precautions are not sought.

Leptospirosis is preventable if proper vaccination protocols are employed! Your canine companion should be vaccinated starting between six (6) to eight (8) weeks of age, they should receive between three (3) and four (4) vaccines that are given at

three (3) week intervals in order to get the best protection. Following the puppy vaccines your pet should receive a yearly booster or a booster every six (6) months in areas where there are high numbers of rodents. Control of the rodent population, proper drainage and sanitation are also of importance to keep the disease at bay.

If you suspect your pet may have leptospirosis ensure you take precautions such as wearing gloves when handling your pet, separating them from your other animals, getting your pet to a veterinarian immediately and if leptospirosis is suspected you—the pet owner—should seek medical follow up with your family practitioner.

LEPTOSPIROSIS IS A NOTIFIABLE DISEASE

Remember, prevention is better than cure! Have your pets vaccinated against leptospirosis.