

Canine Leptospirosis

FAQs for Dog Owners

What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that can affect people and animals, including pets.

Is leptospirosis found in New York City?

Leptospirosis has been found in all five boroughs of New York City (NYC). The Health Department investigates about two human and 15 dog cases each year. Many different animals can carry the bacteria that cause leptospirosis.

In NYC, the most common sources are rodents and small mammals, such as raccoons and opossums.

How do dogs get leptospirosis?

The bacteria that cause leptospirosis are spread through the urine of infected animals and can survive in water or soil for weeks to months. People and animals can get infected through contact with contaminated urine, water or soil.

The bacteria can enter the body through skin or mucous membranes (eyes, nose or mouth), especially if the skin is broken from a cut or scratch. Dogs usually become infected by drinking, swimming or walking through contaminated water.

What are the signs of leptospirosis, and how long do they last?

Dogs usually get sick one to two weeks after exposure. Illness can last days or weeks and may include fever, chills, vomiting, muscle aches or diarrhea. Some dogs may seem to recover after the initial illness, but later develop more severe symptoms. This second phase of the disease may include kidney failure or liver failure.

A veterinarian will diagnose leptospirosis based on history of exposure, symptoms and a blood test and/or urine test.

Can leptospirosis be treated?

Yes, leptospirosis is treated with antibiotics. Treating the disease early can help prevent severe symptoms. Hospitalization may be necessary for dogs with severe illness.

How can I protect my dog from leptospirosis?

Keep your home free of rodents and prevent your dog from having direct contact with rodents and small mammals when outdoors. Do not let your



Rats are the most common sources of leptospirosis in NYC.



dog drink from puddles or other sources of water that may be contaminated with animal urine.

Speak with your veterinarian about having your dog vaccinated against leptospirosis if you are concerned that it may be at risk.

If my dog already had leptospirosis, can it get infected again?

Yes. Many different types (serovars) of the bacteria exist. After recovery from leptospirosis, an animal will only be immune to the serovar that caused the original infection.

Can I get leptospirosis from my dog?

Yes, although dog-to-human transmission is extremely rare.

What should I do if my dog is diagnosed with leptospirosis?

After starting treatment, your dog may continue to pass leptospirosis bacteria for six weeks. During that time, protect yourself and others:

- Wash your hands carefully after direct contact with your dog or its urine.
- Have your dog urinate in an area where the urine will dry up quickly and where other dogs or people will not come into contact with it. Sunlight and drying will kill the bacteria.
- Wear disposable gloves when cleaning the dog's bedding or any areas with urine.
- Disinfect areas that may have been contaminated by urine, feces (stool) or vomit with an iodine- or bleach-based disinfectant.
- Contact your doctor if you feel sick.

For more information:

- Call your veterinarian
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/leptospirosis
- Visit the Rat Information Portal (RIP) at nyc.gov/rats to see NYC rat inspection maps and learn what you can do to prevent and manage rats