Protect your family against Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis, I'm sure we've all heard of it, but what actually is it? Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that affects a number of animals including mice, rats, cattle, pigs, dogs, cats and humans. Yes, that's right, we are also susceptible to leptospirosis so it is more important than ever to safe guard, not only our health, but the health of your pets as well.

So how is leptospirosis transmitted?

There are multiple strains of the *Leptospira* bacteria that are carried by livestock and rodents. In built up areas like Darlinghurst and Double Bay, rats and mice pose a big risk for the spread of leptospirosis to our furry friends. The most common way that dogs can get leptospirosis is through water contaminated with urine, particularly stagnant or slow-moving water like puddles, ponds or lakes. Another source is from contact with urine-contaminated soil, bedding or food.

Unfortunately, all dogs are at risk of leptospirosis, regardless of their age, breed, lifestyle, geographic location, time of year, and other factors. However, the following situations can increase that risk and is strongly advisable to avoid if possible:

- Exposure to or drinking from slow-moving or stagnant water sources
- Free roaming on rural properties (because of exposure to potentially infected wildlife or farm animals or urine-contaminated water sources)
- Exposure to wild animals (especially rodents) or farm animals, even if in the backyard

What signs should I look out for if I suspect my dog has been infected?

The signs of leptospirosis in dogs varies greatly and can be quite non-specific which makes it even harder to diagnose. The bacteria tends to attach itself to cells that line the blood vessels and also spreads throughout the body to affect other organs, most notably the liver and kidneys. Signs can range from mild to severe, and sometimes become life-threatening. Some clinical signs include:

- Fever
- Decreased appetite
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Increased thirst and urination
- Lethargy or weakness

- Stiffness and soreness

If you notice any of these symptoms, even if not suspicious of exposure to Leptospira, please call to arrange an appointment with your veterinarian.

How can we better protect our pets and ourselves from leptospirosis?

Fortunately, vaccines are available to protect dogs from this potentially life-threatening disease.

Because of the risk and severity of leptospirosis, experts recommend that **all** dogs be vaccinated. This can help protect people from infection, too.

An initial series of two vaccinations spaced 4 weeks apart is typically recommended, followed by annual boosters to ensure protection. Vet HQ are happy to announce that despite following a nationwide shortage of available vaccines, we have received new stock of the leptospirosis vaccination for dogs.

If you are unsure if your dog is protected or know that they are overdue, please call the clinic to arrange a health check appointment and lepto vaccine. At the moment, there is no available vaccine for leptospirosis available for cats.

Although cats are susceptible to infection, the incidence of clinical leptospirosis in cats is rare. We advise keeping them indoors and ensuring no access to rodents and stagnant water sources to help reduce the risk of leptospirosis in cats.