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LEPTOSPIROSIS

LEPTOSPIROSIS is a bacterial disease that CAN BE TRANSMITTED TO HUMANS AND OTHER ANIMALS. The bacteria is found in ponds, puddles, muddy areas and damp, alkaline soil. The organism is shed in the urine of infected animals; those most responsible for the spread of the disease are rats, opossums, raccoons and, to a lesser extent, mice.

Leptospirosis is a POTENTIALLY FATAL DISEASE and can affect the liver, the kidneys, and the nervous system. Diagnosis is based on clinical signs and blood tests. Most dogs with leptospirosis have vague signs of lethargy or inappetance for a few days; other specific signs such as increased thirst and urination, vomiting or diarrhea, will refer to the organs involved.

Early treatment is the key to success. Dogs should be hospitalized for intravenous fluid administration and injectable antibiotics. Multiple blood and urine tests are performed to chart the progression of the disease. Long-term (6-8 weeks) oral antibiotic administration is necessary to eliminate the bacteria from the body.

The bacteria can be shed in the urine of recovered dogs for UP TO THREE MONTHS. For that period of time, the dog should be taken out to urinate in one specific area which is then sprayed with an iodine-based disinfectant, like Betadine or its equivalent. AVOID CONTACT WITH THE URINE. The bacteria enters the body through contact with mucous membranes or abraded skin. People with leptospirosis have flu-like signs, anemia and/or jaundice and usually are very ill. Leptospirosis is a reportable disease in New York State; so far during this epidemic, no humans have been infected.

Like the human influenza virus, there are several strains (serovars) of leptospirosis. Until recently, there were no vaccines for leptospirosis but there is now a vaccine for dogs. A dog would receive the first vaccine at the time of their visit and then three to four weeks later, receive the second vaccine. Leptospirosis is a VERY SERIOUS DISEASE. Although recuperating animals regain their energy and appear more normal, it takes several weeks for the affected organs to regain their function. In addition, an infected dog should not be allowed to urinate in areas where other dogs might be for a period of three months, to avoid passing along this contagious disease.