

**Animal Health Alert: Local Increase in Reported Canine Leptospirosis**  
**7.23.2021**

Dear Colleagues,

Over the last couple of weeks, we have noted a large increase in reported confirmed and suspect canine leptospirosis cases.

- Most of the affected dogs either live in or had exposures in locations on the west side of the county or the San Fernando Valley.
  - A number of dogs may have been exposed at a boarding facility in Santa Monica
  - Some dogs may have been exposed at dog parks or beaches
- To date, several cases have required hospitalization and extensive care.
- Although some of these dogs have confirmed positive on either serology or PCR testing of blood and/or urine, the causative *Leptospira* species or serovar(s) involved are currently not known.

**Leptospirosis is a zoonotic disease.** In humans, symptoms include flu-like illness (fever, body aches, etc.), vomiting, and jaundice, among others. Humans are infected in similar ways as animals, such as through direct contact, ingestion, or inhalation of contaminated water or soil. However, the most likely exposure when a dog is sick is through direct contact with their urine, so it is especially important for your clients to practice good hygiene around a dog that is sick or recovering from leptospirosis and always use gloves when cleaning up urine. Clients and staff should reach out to their primary care physician if they have questions regarding leptospirosis in people or the need for testing themselves or family members. Veterinary clinic staff should wear proper PPE when handling dogs suspected of having leptospirosis and always use good hygiene when disinfecting areas that may have had contact with urine. Do not use pressure washing to clean urine contaminated areas, as this may create aerosols.

**Leptospirosis is a reportable animal disease in Los Angeles County.** From 2008–2020, 88 cases of leptospirosis in dogs were reported in Los Angeles County. However, since some dogs may be asymptomatic or have mild symptoms and may not be tested, we believe it is likely underdiagnosed and underreported, so the true local incidence in dogs is unknown. We believe most cases in Los Angeles County are contracted due to contact with wildlife, however other forms of transmission may be more likely when there is an increased incidence of disease.

**The quadrivalent *Leptospira* vaccine is recommended for dogs, especially those boarding in kennels or in congregate settings (daycare, training), or those with active outdoor lifestyles.** Previously there has been concern about vaccine reactions from the *Leptospira* vaccine. However, current vaccines containing leptospiral antigen have not been shown to be more reactive than other vaccines for dogs.

**Leptospirosis can also be prevented by controlling dogs' contact with wildlife.** Advise your clients to not attract wildlife to their yards. Keep bushes and shrubbery trimmed, close off

outdoor crawl spaces, do not leave out pet food and water bowls, and routinely clean food or water bowls that may have been contaminated by wildlife. If they suspect an infestation of rodents, they should consult an exterminator.

**Los Angeles County veterinarians are advised to:**

1. Educate clients about leptospirosis and steps that may be taken to reduce risk.
2. Assess dogs for potential leptospirosis exposure (e.g. exposure to wildlife or rodents in yard, potentially contaminated water) and vaccinate those at risk.
3. Report all cases of leptospirosis in Los Angeles County: Canine cases may be reported using the form available at:  
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/docs/Forms/LeptospirosisReportForm.pdf>

More information can be found at:

- [LA County Veterinary Public Health - leptospirosis](#)
- [2010 ACVIM Small Animal Consensus Statement on Leptospirosis](#)
- [Center for Food Security and Public Health FAQ for Clients](#)

Please call (213-288-7060) or email ([vet@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:vet@ph.lacounty.gov)) if you have questions regarding leptospirosis or any other questions.

Sincerely,

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