



PET HEALTH AND YOU

LEPTOSPIROSIS
RABIES
INTERNAL PARASITES



What is leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is a serious but treatable disease. It's a bacterial infection that affects many mammals, including humans, horses, cattle, pigs, and dogs. In humans and dogs, infection causes a wide range of symptoms, from none to a high fever, muscle aches, headache, vomiting, diarrhea, and jaundice (yellow skin and eyes). Dogs may also refuse to eat or move because of stiffness and severe muscle pain. If you or your pet experience symptoms of leptospirosis, speak with your doctor or veterinarian as soon as possible.

Early detection is important because leptospirosis can cause serious complications if not treated. If left untreated, the disease can cause death in both humans and animals.

How do people and animals get leptospirosis?

Leptospirosis is caused by a type of bacteria, called leptospire. The bacteria is spread when urine from an infected human or animal contaminates water, food, or soil. If a person or animal swallows or touches the contaminated water, food, or soil, they can get infected. Keep in mind that leptospire can survive on human skin. If you touch something that's contaminated, the bacteria can transfer from your hands to your mouth or food. The disease does not spread from person to person. All animals can become infected with leptospire, although cases in cats are rare.

How can I prevent leptospirosis in my pet?

Vaccinate your pet against leptospirosis. Even if your pet has been infected with leptospirosis, it's important to get a vaccination. There are many types of leptospire and the vaccine can protect your pet from other types of leptospire.

How can I protect myself and other people when my pet has leptospirosis?

The risk of a human getting leptospirosis from a pet is low. But it's important to follow these precautions to keep yourself and others healthy.

- Do not touch or come in contact with urine, blood, or tissues from your infected pet.
- If you need to have contact with animal tissues or urine, wear protective clothing, such as gloves and boots, especially if you're occupationally at risk (veterinarians, farm workers, and sewer workers).
- Always wash your hands after touching your pet or anything that might have your pet's feces or urine on it.
- If you're cleaning surfaces that may be contaminated or have urine from an infected pet on them, use a disinfectant or a solution of 1 part household bleach in 10 parts water.
- Make sure that your infected pet takes all of its medicine.

GENERAL TIPS TO KEEP YOU AND YOUR FAMILY HEALTHY

- Always wash your hands well after touching an animal.
- Pick up dog and cat waste from your yard every day, especially in areas where both children and animals play.
- Cover your sandbox to stop outdoor animals from using it as a toilet.
- Have your pet checked regularly (at least once a year) by a veterinarian and keep all vaccinations up-to-date.



What is rabies?

Rabies is a serious infection of the brain and spinal cord and is caused by a virus. Humans get the disease from the bite from an infected animal. Without treatment, rabies is fatal.

Currently, the number of rabies cases in Windsor-Essex County is very low, but it's important to remain watchful as the virus can enter the community at any time.

How do people get rabies?

Rabies is passed on through the saliva of an animal infected with the virus. If a person is bitten by an infected animal, the virus enters the blood. In North America, the animals most often responsible for biting humans are raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes, and bats.

What are internal parasites or worms?

Internal parasites are organisms that feed on another animal. The most common parasites in dogs and cats are worms. Most puppies and kittens get worms before or shortly after birth. There are many types of worms that can infect your pet, including tapeworm and roundworm. These parasites can affect your pet's ability to absorb nutrients and without treatment, can damage the lining of the intestinal tract (stomach).

Parasites not only affect our furry friends, but they can also be passed on to us. The parasite's eggs are passed through your pet's feces and are spread throughout the area the pet spends time in. Once in the environment, these eggs can remain active and be a health risk for your pet and your family for years.

What about bats?

Most of the recent human rabies cases in Canada were because of a bat bite. Unlike other animals that carry rabies, bats are small and have needle-like teeth. If they bite you there may be no obvious marks and you may not notice that you have a bite. Because of this, seek medical attention immediately if:

- You are bitten by a bat.
- Saliva from a bat gets into your eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound.
- A bat lands on you.
- You wake up and find a bat in your room.
- You find a bat in the room of an unattended child or person unable to report whether they had direct contact with the bat (e.g. an intoxicated person).

If a bat is found to be rabid, or if the bat is not available for testing, anyone exposed to the bat will be advised to receive post-exposure rabies treatment.

How can I protect my pet from rabies?

There are many things you can do to protect your pet from rabies. The most important is to have your pets regularly vaccinated for rabies. Other steps you can take include:

- Control of your pets by keeping cats and ferrets indoors and keeping dogs under direct supervision.
- Spay or neuter your pets to reduce the number of unwanted animals that may not be properly cared for.
- Call the Windsor-Essex Humane Society (519-966-5751) to report animal problems such as a stray running loose or an injured animal. They may be ill or unvaccinated and need to be treated.

What do I do if I am bitten by an animal?

If you're bitten by any animal, such as a raccoon, dog, or bat, seek medical attention right away and report the bite to the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit at 519-258-2146. We can then let you know what the next steps are that you will need to take. If you are bitten, it's your responsibility to keep track of the animal that bit you. In the case of wildlife, this may involve hiring a professional to catch it.

Can I get internal parasites from my pet?

Yes. Roundworms are the most common intestinal parasite of pets and the most likely to be passed on to humans. Humans can accidentally ingest worm eggs that have been passed through the pet's feces.

How can I reduce the risk of parasites infecting my family?

You can reduce the risk of infection by getting rid of parasites from pets. Your veterinarian can tell you the best treatment. Other steps include:

- Do not let children play in areas such as pet "walk areas," and other high-animal traffic areas.
- Cover your sandbox to stop outdoor animals from using it as a toilet.
- Practice good personal hygiene, which means washing your hands and your children's hands thoroughly and often.
- Dispose of pet feces on a regular basis. This can help remove worm eggs before they are picked up or ingested by pets or humans.

Key reference:

British Columbia Ministry of Health. (2006). *Role of pets in human disease*. Retrieved July 17, 2007 from <http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/hfile61a.stm>