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Canine Leptospirosis Update

Leptospirosis is now a common cause of acute kidney failure in dogs. Dogs and people are most often infected indirectly from contaminated water, but they can be infected through direct contact with animals shedding the organisms in urine. Livestock and wild animals are reservoirs of the bacteria. The *Leptospira* organisms can penetrate mucus membranes in the eye, nose, throat and skin and then invade the bloodstream and multiply.

Early clinical signs of the disease include lethargy, vomiting, fever and lack of appetite. Other signs may include abdominal pain, diarrhea, muscle pain, seizures and pinpoint hemorrhages in the skin and eye. With early treatment, more than 75% of dogs survive. However, some of these dogs will have permanent kidney damage. Vaccination will prevent the disease in over 95% of dogs.

In the last 15 years, cases of leptospirosis have increased dramatically. In 1990 there was approximately 1 case per 10,000 dogs. In 2004 there was 1 case per 1,000 dogs. This is significant for your dog. It is also significant for you and your family. Leptospirosis organisms do infect humans. So vaccinate your dog and protect your whole family.

Leptospirosis is a deadly bacterial disease spread by wildlife including raccoons, skunks, opossums, squirrels, rats and sometimes other dogs. The Leptospirosis bacteria is shed in urine, and dogs become infected after contact with fresh urine of infected animals. Typical dog behavior of sniffing, licking and eating grass can set them up for exposure. If dogs drink from standing water containing the bacteria, they also can get Leptospirosis.

Risk assessment:

- Does your dog play outdoors where exposure or contact with wildlife is possible?
- Does your dog ever drink from ponds or puddles?
- Do you bring your dog along while walking, hiking, camping, picnicking, hunting or fishing?
- Are skunks, opossums, racoons or rats found in your area?
- Has Leptospirosis been diagnosed in your area in either people or dogs?
 - 2 human cases in 2000 in Orange County