Once a case of leptospirosis is diagnosed (or in the event of an outbreak), we have an obligation to manage affected patients, while preventing exposure of healthy pets. The potential for zoonotic transmission also mandates prompt and accurate client education, as well as instituting measures to protect hospital staff from exposure.

Leptospirosis patients (or suspects) should not be permitted to urinate in the hospital’s reception area or other common areas of the facility, and any urine spills or accidents should be cleaned and disinfected promptly. As a general rule, hospital staff are advised to wear gloves whenever cleaning animal waste. This is particularly critical when dealing with a patient that may have leptospirosis. Facial shields, gowns, and masks are also recommended, in case urine splashes or becomes aerosolized.

Pet owners will undoubtedly have questions and concerns, but the potential for zoonotic transmission should be addressed without creating panic or confusion, while emphasizing the importance of bringing the pet in for examination if leptospirosis is suspected.

GET CLIENT INFORMATION:

If a client calls with questions about his/her pet, or concerns that a pet may have been exposed to leptospirosis, an appointment should be scheduled as soon as possible, as leptospirosis can cause severe, rapidly progressive signs in some patients. If possible, try to obtain the following information:

- Has the dog ever been vaccinated against leptospirosis? If so, when? If this information isn’t known, can vaccine records be obtained?
- When did the suspected exposure occur? Were other pets or family members similarly exposed?
- What signs of illness are being observed at home?
- When did signs of illness initially appear?
Frequently Asked Questions
CANINE LEPTOSPIROSIS

The following client talking points may be helpful:

RECOGNIZE AND RECOMMEND:
To properly advise clients, clinicians and hospital staff should become familiar with the most common signs associated with canine leptospirosis including the following:

+ Fever
+ Appetite loss (anorexia)
+ Vomiting
+ Diarrhea
+ Increased drinking and urination
+ Blood in the urine (hematuria)
+ Abdominal pain
+ Weakness
+ Unusual bruising or bleeding
+ Jaundice

Clients reporting any of these signs in their pet(s) should be advised to schedule an evaluation as soon as possible.

ELEVATE:
If a client prefers to speak with a veterinarian, this should take place immediately, to avoid delaying an in-clinic patient evaluation.

ADDRESS THE POTENTIAL ZOONOTIC RISK:
+ Because leptospirosis is potentially zoonotic, owners may want to take some additional precautions at home, pending an examination of their pet and confirmation of a diagnosis. These include:
+ Encourage family members (especially children) to wash their hands after handling the pet, and encourage children to wash their hands after playing outside
+ Clean all urinary accidents promptly, while wearing gloves. Wash hands afterwards, even if gloves are worn
+ Limit exposure of children to urine or potentially urine-contaminated areas (such as bedding, and food/water dishes)
Frequently Asked Questions
CANINE LEPTOSPIROSIS

PREVENTION:
There are several leptospirosis vaccines currently available for dogs, and all have been proven to be safe and effective when used as directed. Leptospirosis is categorized as a non-core vaccine by the American Animal Hospital Association; vaccine recommendation should be based on exposure risk and the incidence of disease in the geographic area. Other vaccine protocols may exist and each practicing DVM should be aware of their hospital’s protocols.
For clients who travel or hunt with their dogs, or for dogs that participate in field trials and other outdoor activities, these lifestyle habits should be taken into consideration when determining exposure risk.

CLIENT TALKING POINTS:
✚ Protect your pet by minimizing their exposure to areas where wildlife may live or travel. Leptospirosis is transmitted primarily through contact with urine from an animal that already has the disease, but other body fluids and tissues can also be sources of infection.
✚ Dogs should not be permitted to drink from standing water, lakes or streams, or interact with wildlife. Dogs can become exposed to leptospirosis “directly” thorough contact with a reservoir host (opossum, raccoon, rat, skunk, etc.) or through direct contact with an infected dog. “Indirect” exposure is also possible, through contact with urine-contaminated water, food, bedding, soil or equipment.
✚ Although dogs that spend large amounts of time outside may be at greater risk, urban or primarily indoor dogs can also be exposed through direct or indirect contact with urban reservoir hosts (skunks, raccoons, rats, etc.).
✚ If any pets exhibit suspicious clinical signs, an examination should be scheduled as soon as possible.
✚ Antibiotics are a critical part of treatment for leptospirosis. Owners are advised to notify hospital staff of any known drug allergies or sensitivities their pet may have.
✚ The risk of transmission from an infected dog to a human in the same household is not as high as once thought, but precautions should be taken when caring for an infected dog. These include wearing gloves when cleaning urine; and washing hands (even if gloves are worn) after cleaning urine, bedding, bowls, crates/cages etc.
Frequently Asked Questions

CANINE LEPTOSPIROSIS

- Infected dogs should not be allowed to urinate near standing water, which could become contaminated.

- Once antibiotics are initiated, infected animals are no longer a risk for spreading infection within 24 hours, so early treatment helps reduce exposure risk for humans and other pets.

- Due to the potential for zoonotic transmission, owners of infected dogs are advised to notify their health care providers (physicians, pediatricians, etc.) immediately regarding the leptospirosis diagnosis in their pet and follow their recommendations.

- At the clinician’s discretion, pets requiring intensive supportive care or hospitalization may be referred to a 24 hour or intensive care facility for appropriate treatment.