

# Pawsitive Press

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## Leptospirosis

Christen Woodley, DVM

Living in Florida, the sunshine state, most certainly has its perks! However, the rainy, hot, humid summers also bring a fair share of annoyances. Allergies, fleas, heartworms, heat stroke risk, etc. Believe it or not, there are certain diseases our pets are at a greater risk of contracting due to our local environment. Though geographic location is a big factor, some of our pets will be at higher risk than others due to their home environment, social activity, breed and conformation, etc. Ailments such as parasites and heat stroke are a little more obvious. I want to take this time to talk about something you can't see and might not have heard of...Leptospirosis.

Leptospire are very small, very motile organisms known as spirochetes. They may infect animals AND humans. Animals that can carry this organism



without showing signs of infection are dogs, raccoons, skunks, opossums, rats, cows, and pigs. These animals are considered reservoirs and because of their range, infection is seen in rural and suburban areas. The number of cases diagnosed has increased since the 1980s. Leptospire are transmitted in urine and pets can become infected by swimming, drinking, or walking through contaminated water. It is most commonly contracted by contact with mucous membranes (mouth, nose, and eyes) and abraded skin (cuts, etc.). Less common routes are bite wounds, transplacentally (from the mother while in the womb), and contaminated environment (soil, food, bedding, water, etc.) Contaminated water is

the highest risk factor in our area and includes creeks, ponds, lakes, standing water, parks, etc. The organism usually reaches its highest levels in the kidney and liver, which accounts for the symptoms you as a pet owner may notice. Owners may notice lethargy, vomiting, anorexia, fever, muscle pain, a yellow coloration to the gums or eyes, and/or changes in water intake and urinary habits. If infected with Leptospirosis, decreased platelet levels can also become a problem. This is important because platelets help in the process of blood clotting. Animals with low platelets may have bruising that looks like paintbrush strokes or pinpricks, nosebleeds, or dark stool similar to coffee grounds or tar. Pets demonstrating any of these clinical signs need to be examined by a veterinarian! Further testing will need to be done to try to determine the cause

**Leptospirosis**  
**Continued**

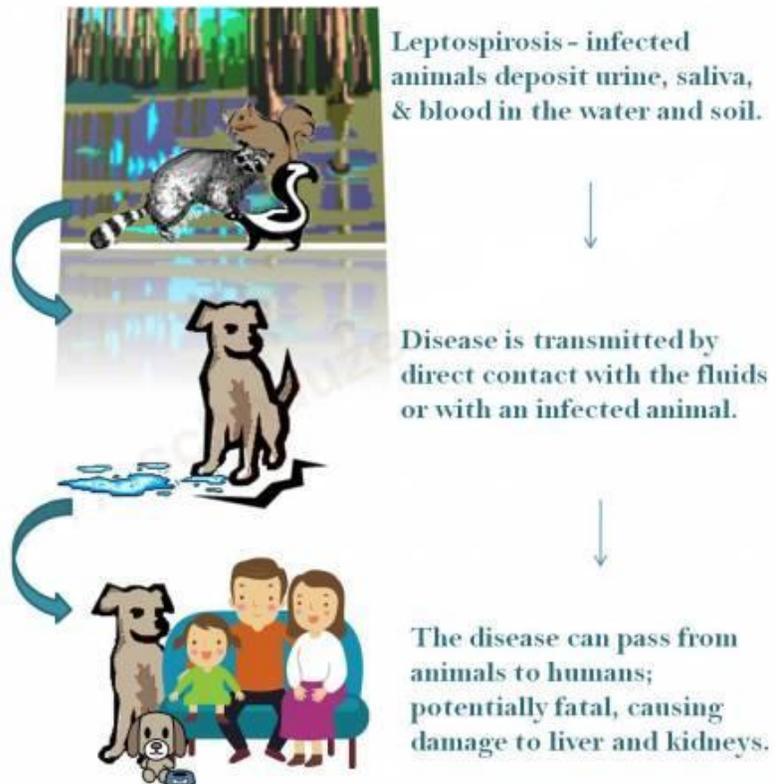
of the symptoms and whether testing for leptospirosis is indicated. There are tests and treatment options available if needed. We want to do everything we can to help protect your family pet from this contagious and potentially fatal disease.

Not only can Leptospirosis affect our pets, but it is also a zoonotic disease. This means that it can be transmitted from animals to humans. This risk can be reduced by avoiding stagnant or contaminated water, washing your hands after handling contaminated water or objects contacting animal urine, and vaccinating your pet. The good news is that due to much research and development, there are vaccinations to help prevent Leptospirosis. They typically help protect against multiple bacterins, meaning multiple strains of the organism. Though it is possible there may be strains in the environment not found in the vaccine, similar to the flu having different strains, vaccinated pets are still at a much lower risk than those not

not vaccinated. We do recommend dogs receive the vaccine if they partake in higher risk activities and live in higher risk areas. If they have never had the vaccine before we first do a booster series consisting of two shots, three weeks apart. They are then boosted annually thereafter. Though cats and dogs are at risk, at this time cats are not routinely vaccinated because they appear to have a natural resistance.

***Congratulations to Dr. Todd,  
recipient of the 2012/2013  
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MA SHI HUANG is a legendary veterinarian from the Huang-di (Yellow Emperor) Period, which spanned from 2,698 to 2,598 B.C. According to Chinese legend, he is the first to treat animal diseases with acupuncture and herbal medicine and is thus commonly regarded as the father of Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine. The MA SHI HUANG - TCVM practitioner of the Year Award is an honor issued each year by the Chi Institute of Chinese Medicine to one distinguished veterinarian in recognition of his or her excellence in TCVM practice. The 2012/2013 Ma Shi Huang is awarded to Dr. Todd, for his exceptional work both as a TCVM clinician and instructor.



**Animal Hospital of Dunedin**  
1355 Pinehurst Rd  
Dunedin, FL 34698

**Phone:** 727-733-9351  
**Fax:** 727-733-8165  
**E-mail:**  
[practicemanager@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:practicemanager@tampabay.rr.com)



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