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LEISHMANIASIS

What is Leishmaniasis?

Leishmaniasis is a disease caused by a protozoan parasite found in dogs and certain rodents in many parts of the world. It is an important disease because humans can also contract Leishmaniasis. There is no direct transmission from dog to man, or vice versa. You can not become infected with Leishmaniasis from your dog or cat.

Leishmaniasis can cause one of two types of infections, a cutaneous or skin infection and a visceral or organ infection.

Leishmaniasis is common in the Mediterranean. It is also found in South and Central America, southern Mexico, and has been reported in Oklahoma, Ohio and Texas. It is considered endemic in foxhounds in the United States. It is transmitted by a small biting sand fly (*Phlebotomus spp.*).



What are the clinical signs of Leishmaniasis?

Virtually all dogs will develop the visceral form of the disease. Ninety percent will also have cutaneous involvement. The clinical signs associated with the visceral form include fever, anorexia, weakness, exercise intolerance, severe weight loss, diarrhea, vomiting, bleeding from the nose, and blood in the stool (usually seen as dark, tarry stools, called melena). Most dogs will develop swollen lymph nodes and an enlarged spleen, and will progress to kidney failure.

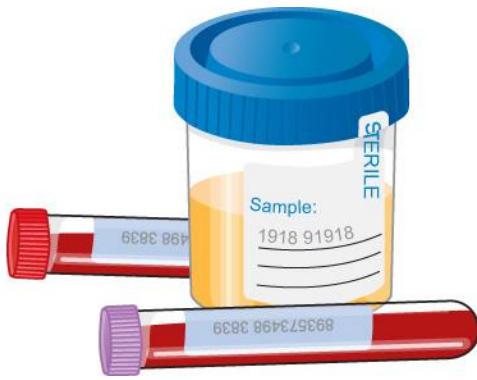
Clinical signs of the cutaneous form most commonly include thickening and hardening of the tissues on the muzzle and footpads, called hyperkeratosis. Many dogs will lose the pigment or dark coloring of these tissues as the disease progresses. Nodules or hard lumps may form in the skin and the coat often appears dull and brittle with areas of hair loss.

How is the disease diagnosed?

Leishmaniasis is diagnosed on medical history, especially recent travel to an area with endemic Leishmaniasis, and clinical signs. Blood and urine tests are usually performed along with tissue biopsies. In the United States, if your pet is diagnosed with Leishmaniasis, it must be reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In Canada, Leishmaniasis has not been reported to occur, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) lists it as one of the “Non-reportable List B” diseases.

Is there any treatment?

The treatment requires administration of a special drug, sodium stibogluconate, which is available from the CDC. Alternative treatments include meglumine antimonite, allopurinol and / or amphotericin B, most often in combination. Supportive treatments including intravenous fluid support, special diets and antibiotics if the skin lesions are infected.



What is the prognosis?

The prognosis for a pet diagnosed with Leishmaniasis is very guarded to grave. Most dogs die from kidney failure. Severely ill pets may not be able to undergo treatment. Your veterinarian will provide you with specific treatment recommendations based on your pet's condition.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM.
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