



SEASIDE PET CLINIC

Quality Medicine with a Personal Touch

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Leptospirosis

Our local beach could be a source of a serious disease that infects humans and dogs called Leptospirosis. Recently, television news reported a sick sea lion on the Seaside beach that had a possible case of this disease and warned people to stay away from the animal. The report did not mention that dogs are also at risk.

Leptospirosis is a disease caused by a bacterium of the genus *Leptospira*. The most common method of transmission of the bacteria is through water contaminated by the urine of an infected animal. The bacteria can also be present in moist soil or food and the disease can be spread by consuming contaminated sources (eating the food or drinking the water) or exposure through an open wound.

Dogs seem to be more susceptible to leptospirosis than other domestic pets and a simple vaccine will help protect them from developing the potentially fatal disease. Symptoms in dogs can develop in just a few days or as many as 30 days after exposure. Signs may include fever, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea, refusal to eat, severe weakness and depression, stiffness, and muscle pain. Left untreated, leptospirosis may develop into kidney failure and death. Treatment includes antibiotics and sometimes specific support for failing organs.

In humans, symptoms start similar to those of the flu. Sometimes the person will become better only to have much worse signs appear weeks later if kidney or liver failure occurs. Like dogs, treatment involves antibiotics and supportive care if organs are affected.

The best way to avoid the disease is to have your dog vaccinated. This vaccine must be given on a yearly basis to provide full protection. No vaccine is 100% effective, however, and it is always best to discourage your dog from drinking out of stagnant water sources or having contact with any wild animals.

Humans can avoid the disease by not drinking, wading, or swimming in water that may be contaminated by animal urine. Also, gloves should be worn if you might have contact with your dog's urine, blood, or feces.

For more information about the vaccine for dogs, contact Seaside Pet Clinic at (503) 738-8846. General information about the disease can also be found on the website for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.