

Leptospirosis Spreading Through Baltimore's Dogs

Bacterial disease can be transferred between warmblooded animals.

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A highly contagious bacterial disease that can be contracted by humans is hitting dogs in areas of Baltimore, according to local animal hospitals.

Leptospirosis, also commonly referred to as leptos, is a disease that can be transferred to and from any warmblooded animal through contact with an infected animal's urine. It's typically transferred by rodents, but can be spread by any animal.

Eastern Animal Hospital in Baltimore reported seeing about seven dogs who may have the disease over about a one-week period beginning Dec. 4 and four confirmed cases in the past six months.

Prior to that, the last reported case was in 2001.

Vaccinating dogs does not completely protect them because there are seven different types of leptospirosis and the vaccine only protects against four of them. Some of the dogs recently diagnosed have had one of the unprotected types, according to Eastern Animal Hospital veterinarian Elizabeth Berliner, DVM.

Symptoms of leptospirosis include severe headache, chills, high fever, aching muscles and vomiting. If left untreated, a canine victim may develop meningitis, kidney damage, liver failure and respiratory problems.

Despite the disease being communicable to humans, there has only been one human case of leptospirosis in Maryland in the past 10 years, and that was in 2000, according to the Maryland Department of Health.