

Dog Owners Warned of Waterborne Disease

Purdue veterinarian says infection can spread to animals and humans.

Posted: July 3, 2008, 5 a.m. EDT

Don't drink the water. That's what a Purdue University veterinarian warns cat and dog owners to remember when wading or swimming in water this summer.

Providing fresh, clean drinking water for pets can prevent the spread of the bacterial disease leptospirosis, said Steve Thompson of Purdue's School of Veterinary Medicine. A small cut on the foot or a sip from a puddle are all it takes for the disease to spread to animals and humans.

Leptospirosis originates from a bacterial infection in animals and is traced to animal urine found in soil, puddles, creeks, and larger bodies of water, Thompson said. Companion animals can be exposed by swimming or walking through water.

The disease can cause severe kidney and liver damage and is often spread by raccoons, opossums, skunks, or deer. Rodents, foxes, and coyotes also carry the bacteria.

The incidence of leptospirosis is low nationally and rarely is fatal, however, wading or swimming in potentially contaminated water should be avoided. Pet owners can guard themselves by wearing protective clothing or footwear.