



# Pointers In Need Information Sheet #8

## “Canine Leishmaniasis”

March 2022

All of our dogs are tested for Leish and must be free (clear) at the time of testing. **However**, Leish can remain dormant, and it can still develop, but this can take up to seven years to surface. We will help with any advice but will not be responsible for the costs involved.

Canine Leishmaniasis is a vector-borne disease caused by the *Leishmania Infantum Protozoan Parasite* and is transmitted by female *Phlebotomine* sand-flies. It is treatable, but not curable. It could, in some circumstances, be lifeshortening if not detected and treated promptly. Correctly monitored and treated, Leish dogs have a good quality of life.

Dogs from endemic countries (whether they have tested positive to Leish or not) can develop active Leish up to seven years after coming to the UK. There is no specific trigger for this, but it is believed that physical or mental stress and aweakening of a dog's immune system can be contributing factors. Leish is an indirect zoonotic disease, it requires a vector (the sand fly) to spread from host to host. This means it cannot be transferred in non-endemic countries, like the UK, where the climate is too wet and windy for the sand fly to survive. Even in endemic countries, direct dog to dog transmission is not possible, although it is advisable not to use infected dogs or bitches for breeding. There is no current evidence that humans can be infected from their dogs.

### Symptoms

Leish symptoms can be varied and not all dogs will show all (if any) symptoms. Hence, Leish positive dogs require regular blood tests as outlined below:

- Visceral affect organs of the abdominal cavity
- Severe weight loss
- Loss of appetite (anorexia)
- Diarrhoea
- Tarry faeces (less common)
- Vomiting
- Nosebleed
- Exercise intolerance
- Cutaneous, causes lesions on the skin – usually around the sensitive areas ie ears, nose, joints etc
- Alopecia dry, brittle hair coat with symmetrical hair loss
- Hyperkeratosis most prominent finding; excessive epidermal scaling with thickening, depigmentation (loss of skin colour), and chapping of the muzzle and footpads
- Nodules usually develop on the skin surface
- Intra-dermal nodules and ulcers may be seen
- Abnormally long or brittle nails are a specific finding in some patients

- Other signs and symptoms associated with leishmaniasis include:
  - Lymphadenopathy a disease of the lymph nodes with skin lesions in 90 per cent of cases
  - Emaciation
  - Signs of renal failure excessive urination, excessive thirst, vomiting possible
  - Neuralgia painful disorder of the nerves
  - Pain in the joints inflammation of the muscles
  - Osteolytic lesions a “punched-out” area with severe bone loss inflammation of the covering of bones, although rare
  - Fever with an enlarged spleen (in about one-third of patients)

We will always test for Leish when taking a dog on. Full blood work will be carried out for all tick-borne diseases too. We strongly recommend that six months from adoption, a further blood test should be carried out. This necessary blood test is very specific. A Serology Leishmania with Biochemistry, Hemogram and Proteinogram, Blood serology ELISA and NOT a PCR test as this does not contain the DNA of Leish.

Dogs with negative Leish tests do not require medication, however, owners are advised to look out for any possible Leish symptoms. Please contact as soon as possible if you have cause for concern.

Dogs with positive Leish tests or those who have previously been treated for clinical/active Leish will require Allopurinol (a human gout medication readily available in the UK) for around 18 months, or until the dog has had three clear sets of six-monthly blood tests. Please note that in the UK, Allopurinol is a prescription drug and can only be purchased with a Veterinary Prescription. Vets usually charge £12 for a three-month prescription with one repeat, i.e. for six months. Boots or Tesco pharmacies dispense Allopurinol, or it can be purchased online providing you have a veterinary prescription.

### **Veterinary Support**

Unfortunately, UK veterinarians do not receive education about Leish in vet school, neither does the British Veterinary Association encourage their learning. You may encounter prejudice and misinformation at your vet's.

You will also find that the drugs used to treat clinical/active Leish are not licensed in the UK.

Leishmanicidal drugs, i.e. *Milteforan* syrup or *Glucantime* injections, are available from VMD/Defra approved sources such as *Merlinvet*, *NVS*, and *Henry Schein*, to mention a few. The vet will need to download and complete a free SIC (Special Imports Scheme) license from the VMD/Defra website, and shop around.

All adopters of Leish positive dogs will require veterinary support, for blood tests and ongoing monitoring/assessment of their dog's health, so it is important to build a good working relationship with a UK vet, who is willing to learn about Leish and to support their client. There are many of them about.

### **Further Support**

Lastly, there is a Leish support group on Facebook with over 8000 members called *Living With Leish*. Admin provides free advice from diagnosis to sourcing of drugs and treatment methods.

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