

K-State veterinarian warns others to be aware of leptospirosis

MANHATTAN—It's spring, so that means flowers blooming from the spring rains and more opportunities for leptospirosis to spread to domestic and wild animals.

"Lepto is everywhere," said Dr. Kenneth Harkin, a Kansas State University veterinarian and infectious disease specialist whose research emphasis is on Leptospira.

Harkin said lepto is more prevalent during the spring months rather than winter because of weather conditions.

"Lepto loves wet soil," Harkin said. "It's just too cold in the winter."

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that affects humans and animal, but according to Harkin, is rarely seen in cats. The bacteria are spread through the urine of infected animals, which can get into water or soil and can survive there for weeks to months. Infected wild and domestic animals may continue to

excrete the bacteria into the environment continuously or every once in a while for a few months up to several years, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Leptospira varieties have what are termed maintenance hosts and incidental hosts.

Maintenance hosts are those animal species which serve as a reservoir for the Leptospira organism, and in which transmission is very efficient. Incidental hosts include those species of animals that do not act as reservoirs, but that can be infected by the organism. The organism replicates in the kidneys of maintenance hosts and is shed in the urine.

Transmission can occur to the new host, either maintenance or incidental, by coming in contact with contaminated water, soil or the carcass of an infected animal.

The disease is caused by Leptospira spp., a spirochete bacterium related to the bacteria that causes

Lyme disease and syphilis. There are more than 300 pathogenic varieties (serovars), worldwide. Historically, in the United States, two varieties — canicola and icterohaemorrhagiae — were primarily responsible for the disease in dogs.

The incidence of infection from these two has declined over the past 30 years, most likely due in large measure to vaccination. The increase in cases most recently has been due primarily to the varieties pomona and grippityphosa. Until recently no vaccine for these varieties was available.

Because of increased building and development into areas that were previously rural, pets may be exposed to more wildlife, such as raccoons, skunks, squirrels, opossums, or deer that are infected with leptospirosis.

"While people may think of Lepto as a disease spread by wildlife, it can come from backyard wildlife, including raccoons —

even city dogs can get lepto," Harkin said.

Humans are also at risk for contracting leptospirosis. Symptoms can be relatively mild and include flu-like symptoms, ocular pain, redness of the eyes, nasal discharge, fever, or muscle and joint pain; however, it can progress to more severe kidney and liver failure.

"Leptospirosis is a zoonotic disease, Harkin said. "You can get it from your pet. The bacteria can enter the body through skin or eyes, nose, or mouth, especially if the skin is broken from a cut or scratch. Drinking contaminated water can also cause infection." Harkin likens contracting the disease to being "hit by a truck."

Leptospirosis can cause an array of clinical signs. The severity of the disease can vary widely; however, leptospirosis has the potential to be severe and even fatal. Symptoms of Leptospirosis are elevated body temperature, vomiting, muscular

stiffness, weakness, and inflammation of the kidney. In severe cases, jaundice and death may occur. Central nervous system signs may occur with or without other clinical signs, and organisms may be present in the brain tissue for extended periods. Chronic leptospirosis is primarily associated with chronic kidney degeneration.

Shedding of leptospores in the urine may continue for over a year.

Sometimes pets do not have any symptoms. Common clinical signs reported in dogs include fever, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhea, refusal to eat, severe weakness and depression, stiffness, severe muscle pain, or inability to have puppies. Generally younger animals are more seriously affected than older animals. Harkin said the vast majority of dogs have a sudden

onset of vomiting, which may be preceded by muscle or joint pain or stiffness. Pet owners may mistake this early stage as arthritis and treat the dog with aspirin or another nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug.

A less frequent symptom seen in dogs is excessive thirst and urination. Harkin said pet owners are at risk because the dog drinks and urinates so much that they may do so in the house, exposing the owner to the disease.

If caught early, Harkin said treatment is usually effective and the survival rate is good. However, time is of the essence.

"If you let it go for three or five days, treat it with the wrong antibiotic or with inappropriate fluid therapy, it can create irreversible renal failure," Harkin said.

Status of major issues in legislature's wrap-up

TOPEKA (AP) — Status of major issues when the Legislature's wrap-up session ended:

School Finance

Legislators failed to pass a school finance plan. A bipartisan coalition in the House held firm for raising taxes to benefit education, while a majority of senators rejected higher taxes.

The last proposal to fail was worth \$82 million and relied on a loan of transportation funds.

Gay Marriage

During the Legislature's wrap-up session, leaders resurrected a proposed amendment to the Kansas Constitution to ban gay marriage

and civil unions between same-sex couples. The measure won Senate approval but failed in the House.

Gambling

The Senate rejected a bill authorizing five state-owned casinos and installation of slot machines at dog and horse tracks, veterans' and fraternal groups' halls and qualified recreation-related businesses, officials said.

Liquor Laws

Many legislators hoped to amend the Liquor Control Act to apply uniformly to all cities and counties, because the lack of uniformity has allowed 15 communities to authorize Sunday liquor sales, despite a

long-standing ban in state law.

However, no bill passed because the Senate wanted to end Sunday sales even where they exist now, while the House wanted to allow such sales to continue, according to the legislative sources.

Concealed Carry

Legislators approved a bill allowing qualified Kansans to carry concealed handguns, but Gov. Kathleen Sebelius vetoed it. The House failed to override her veto.

Economic Development

Sebelius signed a bill creating the Kansas Bioscience Authority to help establish bioscience as a major industry and create a Center for Entrepreneurship to aid small businesses.

The governor also signed legislation aimed at stimulating agriculture-themed tourism businesses by protecting operators against injury lawsuits.

State Budget

Both chambers approved a bill tying up loose ends in a \$10.3 billion budget already approved for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

The measure would prohibit the state from allowing workers outside the United States to handle telephone calls from Kansans who have questions about food stamps.

Transportation

Sebelius signed a bill using bonds, sales tax revenues and federal funds to shore up the 10-year comprehensive transportation plan begun in 1999.

Medical Services

Sebelius signed legislation intended to raise reimbursements to Kansas doctors and hospitals for treating Medicaid patients for the first time in more than 20 years by securing an additional \$67 million in federal aid.

Open Records

Legislators approved a bill strengthening the Kansas Open Records Act and allowing attorneys' fees in some cases where government agencies denied records in bad faith.

Abortion

A House-passed bill to impose minimum health and safety standards on abortion clinics failed to clear a Senate committee. Sebelius vetoed a similar bill last year.

Immigrants

Legislators approved a proposal granting some illegal immigrants a break on tuition to public universities and colleges.

A House-passed measure to grant illegal immigrants driver's licenses failed to clear a Senate committee.

Correction

An article written in the Goodland Star-News and republished in the Colby Free Press on Friday, April 16, incorrectly said that the house where a St. Francis man, Roger Curry, shot himself was occupied by his former girlfriend. The shooting occurred at the rural Sherman County home where the victim lived.

This was an editing error, the Star-News said.

In addition, Curry, according to family members, was a Goodland

resident and not from St. Francis.

The Goodland Star-News and the Colby Free Press when republishing articles from another newspaper, will correct any mistake or misunderstanding in a news story. Please call our office at (785) 462-3963 to report errors. We believe that news should be fair and factual. We want to keep an accurate record and appreciate you calling to our attention any failure to live up to this standard.

Community Calendar

TUESDAY, May 11

Friends of the Library Board meeting, 7:30 a.m., Pioneer Memorial Library

Student Awards Assembly, underclassmen, Colby High School, 1:30 p.m. Everyone welcome.

Early Childhood Spring Fling, Kindergarten Recognition, 7 p.m. Vocal Pop Concerts, Colby Middle School, High School, 6 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. respectively.

Rebekahs, Betty Carney, 10 a.m. (2nd & 4th Tuesday) Rotary, Student Union, noon

Alcoholics Anonymous, city hall basement, noon (non-smoking) Ladies cards and social, Country Club, 5:30 p.m.

Weight Watchers, United Methodist Church, 6:30 p.m. Domestic Violence Support Group, 7 p.m. Call 462-2860

Sweet Adelines International, United Methodist Church, 7:30 p.m. New Hope Narcotics Anonymous, City Hall Basement, 8 p.m.



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WEDNESDAY

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