



## Spanish dogs and Leishmaniasis

Written by Dogwatch UK, Charity no. 1118841

Leishmaniasis is a controllable disease that affects some Mediterranean dogs, it is transmitted by the Sandfly Mosquito.

Some dogs which are bitten could get this condition that will then lie dormant in them for their life. As we do not have the Sandfly Mosquito in the UK it is not possible for a dog to transmit the disease to other dogs or people. Most of the dogs that test positive are treated and live long and happy lives with no symptoms at all once they have moved to the UK, once they have been treated first to ensure the blood count is very low.

For a dog to catch Leishmaniasis it has to be bitten by a Sandfly that has recently bitten an infected dog. The parasite then needs a period of at least 5-8 days in the sandfly to develop into the infectious form. After that the sandfly could transfer the parasite when it bites the next dog. **THE SANDFLY TRANSMITS THE DISEASE NOT THE DOG.**

Dog Watch UK work with rescuers in Spain, who have over 20 years experience of helping dogs, working hand in hand with vets to gain an understanding of Leishmaniasis. They have learnt that the one significant contributing factor which stands out above all others is **STRESS**. A dog who has been living under the stress of abandonment, cruelty, parasitic infestation, near starvation, giving birth every 6 months in the street etc. will most certainly test positive. But once that same dog is in a safe and secure environment, free from stress and treated for parasites, the drop in the leish count can be dramatic. They also site examples where dogs have become negative. So in many cases, remove the stress, take the dog out of "Sandfly" country - problem solved!

There is also confusion between the Leishmaniasis which exists in the Mediterranean and the Leishmaniasis spread by the mosquito in the African Continent, where it is known to spread to humans.

Some English Vets do not have very much knowledge of the condition which can lead to them giving over cautious advice.

Some Spanish dogs arrive in the UK with Leishmaniasis medication which is not necessary, some rescues believe medication should be issued as a precaution. Common symptoms of Leishmaniasis in dogs are:

- Skin problems: very often centralised around the muzzle, ears and eyes. The typical ring around their eyes, like glasses; lesions which will result in crusts on or around their ears, very often bleeding.
- Nail problems: long and fast growing nails, very often incredibly hard, sometimes deformed
- Lesions: the pads on their feet can be affected with lesions, causing bleeding
- Other skin problems: loss of fur all over their body, usually starting with small patches of lesions.
- Weight loss: affected dogs will very likely lose their appetite. If Leishmaniasis is already in an advanced state, it will mean that the internal organs (kidneys, liver) are affected and failing. Chronic diarrhoea is also very common.
- General: affected dogs may have swollen joints, and/or swelling of their legs, have a fever and they may be less active and even very very calm.

Whilst leishmaniasis is not curable, it is controllable in most cases. Many dogs receiving treatment will live happily until they are old, just by being treated with allopurinol (Human Gout tablets that can be purchased over the counter at the chemist), Prevention in the form of a annual test for leishmaniasis.

NB A one off testing is recommended if the dog is living in an area where the Sandfly is not indigenous; to ensure that there is no latent disease.

Dogs with negative counts do not need Allopurinol.

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**For information on adopting a dog with Leishmaniasis from Axarquia Animal Rescue please contact us at [axarquia-rescue@hotmail.com](mailto:axarquia-rescue@hotmail.com)**