

Points on Pets: Disease worth preventing, even if it's rare

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: We recently received a bill from our veterinarian for a "DHL" vaccination for our dog. We are familiar with the "D," distemper, and the "H," hepatitis, but what is the "L"? Why is it included in the vaccine? It is hard to stay informed about all of the diseases that might affect our dog.

A: The "L" in "DHL" is an abbreviation for "leptospirosis." Although leptospirosis is not diagnosed in dogs in the United States very often any more, it can cause severe illness, particularly in young puppies. The usual signs seen in infected puppies include general weakness, refusal to eat, vomiting, high fever, and reddening of the eyes. The fever usually lasts for about two days. The membranes in the mouth often turn yellow or orange. In very severe cases, extremely foul smelling breath develops and ulcers develop in the mouth and on the tongue. Vomit containing blood and bloody diarrhea are also often seen in severe cases in puppies.

Leptospirosis is caused by a small bacterium-like germ called a spirochete. Although puppies are the most susceptible to leptospirosis, dogs of all ages can be infected.

Vaccination against leptospirosis is inexpensive and is very effective in preventing the clinical signs commonly associated with the disease. However, there are some differences of opinion about whether or not leptospirosis vaccination is necessary in some areas of the United States and whether or not the risk of reactions following vaccination is worth the protection the vaccine offers. Your veterinarian can give you additional information about leptospirosis and other diseases against which you should have your dog vaccinated. As with most diseases, prevention is usually much less costly than treatment.

Q: We are really frustrated because we have had two Welsh corgi puppies that have chewed holes in our dry wall just above the baseboard. Is this a characteristic of Welsh corgi puppies or just puppies in general? Fortunately, my wife is pretty good at patching dry wall.

A: Unfortunately, most young puppies, regardless of their breed, go through a chewing phase while exploring their new environments. Some have attributed this to having excessive energy and being anxious about being separated from their mothers and littermates. This has to be a traumatic experience for every puppy. It is also likely that most new puppies simply do not know how to act when alone and therefore express themselves by doing excessive chewing. Most young puppies and their owners benefit greatly by enrolling in puppy behavior classes. These are offered by many veterinarians and many large pet stores and pet supply stores throughout the United States. Your veterinarian can help you locate a suitable class for you and your new puppy.

Besides giving your new puppy a lot of attention, including a lot of physical activity, you should put her in a crate when no one is available to watch her. Many older dogs eventually go to their crates voluntarily when they want to get away from the hustle of normal activities in a busy household. Every dog should be crate trained. Providing plenty of appropriate chew toys will also help your dog avoid chewing on your walls.

Fortunately, most new puppies develop into well-behaved adults if given plenty of attention and training. Hopefully, you will see some humor in your puppy's chewing days as she matures into a well-behaved companion. Your veterinarian can give you additional advice regarding the care of your new puppy.

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