

Canine Leishmaniasis

Travelling to the Mediterranean might expose your dog to a severe, often fatal disease called canine leishmaniasis. Leishmaniasis is a zoonotic parasitic disease transmitted through the bites of sand flies and is the third most important disease worldwide.

All dogs that travel abroad, particularly to Mediterranean countries, are at risk of contracting canine leishmaniasis.

How is it spread?

The disease is carried from dog to dog by a microscopic parasite called *Leishmania infantum*, which is spread by phlebotomine sand fly bites. Dogs can be bitten up to 100 times an hour during the sand fly season, which begins in May and ends in September.

When an infected sand fly bites a dog, parasites are deposited on the skin. A tiny skin lesion - called a chancre - appears at the site of the bite, usually in the muzzle or the ear. The parasite then invades the dog's cells, spreads into the internal organs and may begin to damage the immune system.

Signs and symptoms

Signs of the disease are highly variable and in some cases, may take several years to manifest. Affected dogs may have a fever, show signs of hair loss (particularly around the eyes), lose weight and develop skin sores and nail disease. Unfortunately, over time, many organs may become involved leading to problems like anaemia, arthritis in many joints, eye and kidney disease.

Prevention and control

Treatment may be complex and often non curative, so prevention is best. Keeping your dog indoors at dawn and dusk when sand flies feed will minimise the risks of being bitten. You can help protect your dog from sand flies for the whole of the sand fly season, speak to your vet for suitable products.



Phlebotomine sand fly



Skin ulcer on a person's forearm