



LEPTOSPIROSIS!

Dr. April Miller



Emergency line rings at 4:30 am: I clear my throat in order not to sound exactly how I'm really feeling. "Good morning..." Panicked owner on the line: "Hi Doc its Bubbles mummy here! She ate some food that I left out for her from yesterday evening just now, then I saw a rat! I've heard that rats can give her a disease? Will she die? She is my baby and only companion Doc!!" Very calmly, I say, ok bring her in the morning, so that we can check her out.

First patient for the morning was Bubbles. Clinically, Bubbles looked fine. However due to the possible rat exposure, we decided to do blood testing in order to rule out a hidden Leptospirosis infection.

Leptospirosis is caused by *Leptospira* bacteria. There are many disease-causing "serovars" infecting animals of various types and humans. Infected animals pass the bacteria in their urine and so rats, because of their habits, can spread the disease when they get into our food or water. Recent research has shown that ticks can carry *Leptospira* bacteria and could possibly transmit the disease making it vector-borne!

The incubation period is usually 4-12 days. As the disease progresses it causes severe liver and kidney failure in the affected patient which can be fatal. In some animals, such as cattle, goats and pigs, abortions may be the only problem seen. Early clinical signs of the disease are non-specific and include fever, depression, anorexia, vomiting, and diarrhea. In later stages, jaundice – yellowing of the tissues – occurs. Early treatment is key – the later the start, the greater the risk of death.

Proper management and sanitation is the KEY to Lepto control.

- Feed animals the serving amount that they will eat at one feeding. Bowls should be washed and put away until the next feeding.
- Provide clean drinking water from clean containers daily.
- Try to control rats by taking the necessary measures safest for your animals.
- Pets should be properly vaccinated.
- Hands should be washed thoroughly after handling all animals.
- Walking, swimming in or drinking contaminated water should be avoided.
- Wear protective boots and clothing when working with livestock, and keep all wounds covered.



Fortunately, all of Bubbles tests came back negative and she and her Mum are happy!

Saving one animal may not change the world but it will surely change the world for one animal!