



Adopting a Dog with Leishmaniasis FAQs

What is Canine Leishmaniasis?

Canine Leishmaniasis or Leish is a disease caused by a bite from a sand fly. In areas where sand flies are, like Cyprus, dogs can be infected, however, only about 5% - 10% of infected dogs will ever develop symptoms or active Leish.

Can Leish be cured or vaccinated against?

Leish is treatable but not curable. There is no vaccine to prevent it. Correctly treated and monitored Leish dogs have a good quality of life.

How do I know if my dog has developed Leish?

Before a dog flies from Cyprus a blood test is done. If Leish positive the dog will be treated in Cyprus to stabilise the disease.

What are the symptoms of Leish?

Symptoms can be varied and not all dogs will show all (if any) symptoms. It is therefore very important for Leish positive dogs to have regular blood tests (see below).

There are two forms of Leish:

Visceral — affects organs:

- Severe weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Tarry faeces (less common)
- Vomiting
- Nosebleed
- Exercise intolerance

Cutaneous — affects the skin:

- Scaling on the skin with thickening, loss of skin colour, and chapping of the muzzle and footpads
- Dry, brittle hair with symmetrical hair loss
- Nodules usually develop on the skin surface
- Intra-dermal nodules and ulcers may be seen
- Abnormally long or brittle nails

Other signs and symptoms include:

- Signs of renal failure — excessive urination, excessive thirst, vomiting possible
- Neuralgia — painful disorder of the nerves
- Pain in the joints
- Inflammation of the muscles
- Fever

If you suspect Leish, dogs need to be blood tested as soon as possible. The earlier Leish is diagnosed and treated, the better the prognosis for the dog.

Can dogs develop Leish after adoption?

Dogs can develop active Leish after coming to the UK. There is no specific trigger for this, but it is believed that physical or mental stress, steroids, unnecessary vaccines, and a weakening of a dog's immune system can be contributing factors.

Can Leish be passed on to other dogs or humans?

To transfer Leish, a vector (the sand fly) is needed to spread from host to host. In the UK the conditions are too wet and windy for sand fly to survive. It would be extremely rare for a dog to pass it to another dog as it requires blood to blood contact and during a time when the disease is active. Even with these exact circumstances it is still unlikely for the disease to be passed onto other pets or humans and there has never been a case of Leishmaniasis being transferred from an infected pet.

Many of our adopters have a Leish positive dog living with a Leish negative dog without any transfer of the disease.

Can I get insurance for a Leish dog?

It is unlikely that insurance will cover Leish.

What medication do Leish dogs need?

Dogs with positive Leish tests will require Allopurinol (a human gout medication readily available in the UK) for around 18 months, or until the dog has had three clear sets of six-monthly blood tests. Some dogs need it for life, other don't. If the disease becomes active, then other medication is needed such as Milteforan (an oral solution that needs to be given in food bombs) or Glucantime which is injected. If needed, we will work with you and your vet and advise on how to get and administer the medication. Allopurinol will continue to be given throughout the course of treatment of either of these two drugs.

How do I get Allopurinol?

Your dog will arrive in the UK with a few months supply of tablets. You then need to ask your vet for a 'Cascade' prescription. Most vets will provide this for a 3- or 6-month period. You can then order the tablets online which is a cheaper alternative to the vet supplying them.

To order online:

Weldricks Pharmacy – <https://www.weldricks.co.uk/> (costs approx. 7p/tablet).

How many Allopurinol tablets do I give my dog?

20mg per kilo per 24 hours split into a minimum of two doses.

Allopurinol comes in 100mg and 300mg tablets.

For example: A 20kg dog will have 200mg in the morning and 200mg in the evening.

Dose 1 and Dose 2 should be 12 hours apart.

A tablet/pill cutter can be useful (available from Amazon).

What ongoing care is needed for a Leish dog?

General blood tests to monitor the dog's general health status and activity of Leish should be done every 6 months, until three clear sets of tests are achieved.

Blood tests recommended are:

- serology/titre (an antibody test)
- standard haematology and biochemistry
- SPE (serum protein electrophoresis).

On receipt of the tests we can help explain the results to you and work with your vet to determine the best course of treatment.

A urine test should also be carried out.

How much do the tests cost?

To have all the above tests can cost between £290 and £550 depending on how expensive your vet is and whereabouts you live in the UK.

Do Leish dogs need a special diet?

As one of the treatments is Allopurinol this can create ammonium crystals in the urinary system. A low purine diet is therefore needed avoiding high purine foods such as peas, cauliflower, spinach and offal. Low phosphorous food is also needed if the dog has any kidney problems. Apple Cider Vinegar can help with eliminating crystals and dissolve stones.

Do I need veterinary support?

All adopters of Leish positive dogs will require veterinary support, for blood tests and ongoing monitoring/assessment of their dog's health, so it is important to build a good working relationship with a UK vet, who is willing to learn about Leish and to support their client. There are many of them about. Ask your vet to go to www.leishvet.org and follow their diagnostic and treatment protocols. They are a group of highly experienced vets from endemic countries and their website is written by vets and for vets.

Can I get other support?

We are always here to help and support you. If you have any concerns about your dog's health, please contact us – we can get advice from vets in Cyprus who are very experienced in dealing with Leish. There is also an amazing Leish support group on Facebook, called [Living with Leish](#), where admin provide free advice from diagnosis, to sourcing of drugs and treatment methods.

