

Cat Owners Warned of Waterborne Disease

Veterinarian says infection spreads to pets and humans.

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One sip from a puddle could spread a waterborne disease to cats and other pets. Don't drink the water. That's what a Purdue University veterinarian warns cat and dog owners to remember if they allow their pets to play near water outdoors this summer.

Providing fresh, clean drinking water for pets can prevent the spread of the bacterial disease leptospirosis, said Steve Thompson of Purdue's School of Veterinary Medicine. A small cut on the foot or a sip from a puddle are all it takes for the disease to spread to animals and humans.

Leptospirosis originates from a bacterial infection in animals and is traced to animal urine found in soil, puddles, creeks and larger bodies of water, Thompson said. Cats and other pets can be exposed by walking through water or swimming.

The disease can cause severe kidney and liver damage and is often spread by raccoons, opossums, skunks or deer. Rodents, foxes and coyotes also carry the bacteria.

The incidence of leptospirosis is low nationally and rarely is fatal, however; wading or swimming in potentially contaminated water should be avoided. Pet owners can guard themselves by wearing protective clothing or footwear.