

Leishmaniasis

At Pointers in Need we believe that every pointer is special and deserves a loving forever home. This is especially true for abandoned pointers who, through no fault of their own, are also living with Leishmania. With a little extra care and attention these beautiful dogs will become the most trusting, loyal companions anyone could ever wish for.

Leishmania – what is it and how do dogs get it?

Canine Leishmaniasis - also known as Leishmania or Leish - is a disease transmitted to dogs via the bite of female phlebotomine sand flies infected with the leishmania parasite. Widespread in many parts of the Mediterranean, as well as the Middle East and parts of Asia, abandoned dogs are particularly susceptible to infection as they live outside at night when the sand flies are most active, often starving or wounded and exposed to the elements. There is currently no cure for leishmania and if untreated it can be fatal. However, when detected early and treated successfully, dogs with the condition can lead full, happy and active lives for many years.

What are the clinical signs?

Many dogs bitten by infected sand flies don't display any symptoms at all and are able to fight off infection with their own immune systems. There is also an extensive incubation period from becoming infected to displaying physical signs – anything from one month to seven years. For dogs that do show signs of active disease, common early indicators include:

- ❖ Loss of appetite and weight loss
- ❖ Lameness
- ❖ Loss of fur particularly around the eyes, ears and paws
- ❖ Hard, thick scaly and chapped skin on the muzzle and pads
- ❖ Skin lesions that do not heal or that come and go
- ❖ Dull, dry coat with flaky 'dandruff'
- ❖ Excessive tiredness
- ❖ Long, thick and brittle claws

How is leishmania detected and treated?

At Pointers in Need, all pointers that we rehome are tested for Leishmania. If positive, they will receive the appropriate veterinary care in order to be fit and well before making the journey to their new homes. Depending on individual cases, some may need a further course of treatment – if that is the case, we will discuss that with you. For many dogs living with leishmania, a daily maintenance dose of an inexpensive drug called Allopurinol (also used to treat gout in humans) and some dietary adjustments are all that is needed to stay healthy. In addition, regular monitoring, via blood tests, is a key aspect of their ongoing care because it is then possible to detect any changes - and respond proactively – before the dog experiences any physical symptoms.

Can leishmania be transmitted to humans or other dogs?

There is NO danger of a dog with leishmania transmitting the disease to humans or other dogs. The only way a dog can become infected with leishmania is via the bite of an infected sand fly. The sand fly is the sole vector, or transmitter, of the disease and, at present, there are no sand flies in the UK (although with climate change this may change in the future).

In countries where leishmania is endemic and where sand flies are present, a number of measures can be taken to help provide protection against infection. These include keeping dogs indoors from dusk to dawn, particularly between the summer months, regular vaccinations and wearing insect repellent collars such as seresto or scalibor.

What else should I consider if I rehome a dog with leishmania?

Veterinary care - in southern Europe vets are well versed in detecting and treating dogs with leishmania. This is not the case in the UK, although with increasing numbers of dogs entering the UK with the condition, there is a growing recognition that this needs to change. Do make sure that your vet is well-informed and/or willing to learn and share knowledge. If not, our advice is to change your vet to one who is.

Avoiding stress - often cited as the single biggest factor that can cause a flare-up of leish-related symptoms, it is probably unsurprising that active cases of leish are found in so many malnourished dogs living in fear on the streets or in over-crowded kill shelters. Once treated, and settled, in a calm, nurturing environment, with access to good food and a comfy bed, many owners find that their dog's symptoms lessen considerably or disappear altogether.

Diet and supplements – pointers with leishmania will benefit greatly from a good quality diet. Owners report success feeding both raw and commercial diets and many also take supplements such as coconut oil, propolis and kaffir to boost their dogs' immune systems. If your pointer is prescribed with allopurinol, it is very important that the diet is low in purines (a natural substance found in both plant and animal cells). This is in order to avoid a build-up of urate crystals forming which can cause severe discomfort when urinating and, in some cases, a blockage in the urinary tract.

Insurance – whilst some dog owners have managed to find insurance cover which excludes leishmania as a pre-existing condition, others have struggled to obtain cover. It is worth shopping around; some people obtain accident cover only, others put aside the insurance money in case it's needed at a future date.

Help and support – our team at Pointers in Need are on hand to support you every step of the way as you embark on your new life with your pointer. Please feel free to ask as many questions as you need to – we are all 'dog adopters' and know first-hand what it is like to prepare for a new dog, especially when they may need a little extra help.

For more information, the Facebook group [Living with Leish](#) is an excellent resource designed to help support dog owners. With more than 2000 members from around the world the group has amassed a wealth of material including academic papers, treatment protocols, suggested food and supplements and a list of great vets.

Comment [ET1]: [Link to living with leish facebook group](#)

You can also read a case study on the beautiful **Solana Sultana**, adopted by Claire Stokes