



# The Southtowns Journal

A Quarterly Newsletter Prepared by the Doctors and Staff of Southtowns Animal Hospital

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## Concerns About Wild and Pet Rodents

Veterinarians do a great deal in the service of public health. Not only do we keep people safe by vaccinating animals against rabies, but also by educating owners and other health care providers in the human sector about illnesses that can make people, as well as animals, sick.

One such illness is Lymphocytic choriomeningitis, a virus carried by wild mice. Laboratory rodents, and pet rodents such as hamster and guinea pigs, can become infected with LCMV from contact with wild mice. This can happen in a breeding facility, in a lab facility, in a pet store, or in the home.

Humans can become infected with this illness through contact with urine, blood, saliva, droppings or nesting materials of infected rodents. This could occur, for example, through a break in the skin, or a bite from an infected rodent. Infection can also be spread by inhaling dust or droplets containing LCMV, such as while sweeping infected rodent droppings.

About 5% of adults have a positive blood test that shows they were infected with LCMV at some time in their lives. Some people with normal immune systems have no symptoms during LCMV infection. Others have a mild illness with symptoms such as headache, fever, chills and muscle aches. Rarely, meningitis, an inflammation around the brain and spinal cord, will occur.

If a woman has an LCMV infection during pregnancy, the unborn baby can also become infected. LCMV during pregnancy can result in loss of the pregnancy. Infants who are infected before they are born can have severe birth defects. It is not known how often this happens because pregnant women with LCMV infection might only have mild symptoms, or none at all, and babies often are not tested. Since LCMV was first identified, more than 50 babies have been reported with this infection worldwide.

In general, the risk of LCMV infection is low. If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, you should avoid contact with rodents, including pets such as hamsters and guinea pigs, and rodent droppings, whenever possible.

There are several ways to reduce the risk of infection. If you suspect there are mice in your home, call a professional pest control company to remove them. Avoid vacuuming or sweeping rodent urine, droppings, or nesting materials.

Have pet rodents live with a friend or family member for the duration of the pregnancy. If this isn't possible, keep the pet rodent in a separate part of the home and have another family member or friend care for the pet and clean its cage. Avoid the room where the rodent is kept.

If you do have contact with a wild rodent or its urine, droppings or nesting materials, thoroughly wash your hands afterward.

Currently, there is no specific treatment available for LCMV infection. If you are pregnant, and have come in contact with a rodent, or have a fever or other symptoms during pregnancy, contact your doctor. Having had a LCMV infection in the past is not a risk for current or future pregnancies.



## Keep Your Cool

It is good to be concerned about your dog's comfort during hot weather. Northern breeds with thick fur like Malamutes and Huskies were developed for cold climates, not the 90 and even 100 degree weather some areas experience in the summer. However, some hair can be beneficial in hot weather, working to insulate dogs from the heat and shield their skin from the sun. Remember, dogs don't use sweat to cool themselves the way people do, so they don't need to have exposed skin in order to stay cool.

However, if a dog has too much hair, the hair can stop being beneficial in hot weather and start retaining too much heat. You may be able to thin the coat out enough by brushing your dog thoroughly and consistently with a wire or "rake" type brush designed for heavy-coated breeds. These brushes can remove some of the fuzzy undercoat layer of fur, sometimes enough to make dogs comfortable in warm weather. Having a dog shaved is an option. Just be careful to leave an inch or so of fur so that there is still some insulation and protection from sunburn.

Even if your dog is shaved, you'll want to be careful when temperatures get really high. Don't leave a dog in a parked car or leave it outside unsupervised for long periods of time. When outdoors, dogs need shade and plenty of water. You can even freeze water bottles full of water and put them where your pet likes to rest to keep cool.

Also, watch for signs of heatstroke. A dog might pant excessively, has and have a staring or anxious expression. It may not obey commands. Other signs are: warm, dry skin, a high fever, rapid heartbeat and vomiting. Lower body temperature quickly with cool water\***NOT ICE COLD**--either by immersion or by spraying gently but thoroughly with a garden hose--and call us at 824-4108 immediately, this is an emergency.



## Did You know??

A cat will almost never meow at another cat. Cats use this sound for humans.  
The first seeing-eye dog was presented to a blind person on April 25, 1938.  
The vaccine against Rabies was developed in 1885 by Louis Pasteur.



## Do Your Part to Prevent Dog Bites

Dog bites are a serious problem in the United States. Each year, 4.7 million people are bitten by dogs according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). They have labeled dog bites in America an "epidemic." The ten breeds involved in the most lethal attacks over the past ten years are pit bulls, rottweilers, German shepherds, huskies, malamutes, Dobermans, chow chows, St. Bernards, Great Danes, and Akitas. In response to this growing problem, some communities have banned ownership of certain dogs that are perceived as dangerous, particularly pit bulls and rottweilers. Are some breeds really more dangerous than others?

### **Breed characteristics**

It is difficult to determine just how much a dog's genetics determine his behavior. It's true that some breeds were bred to perform tasks that require more aggression than others. Pit bulls, for example, were bred to fight for sport. Some people

theorize that pit bulls' genetics make them more prone to violence, and pit bulls have in fact been involved in more fatal attacks than any other dog over the past 20 years. But breeds that are not bred for aggression, including golden retrievers and cocker spaniels have been involved in fatal attacks as well.

It's also true that some breeds simply have more ability to injure people than others do. Though it's no more likely to bite than a smaller dog, if it does bite, a Great Dane can do much more damage than a Maltese, for example.

A study performed by the American Veterinary Medical Association, the CDC, and the Humane Society of the United States, analyzed dog bite statistics from the last 20 years. It found that the statistics don't show that any breeds are inherently more dangerous than others. The study showed that the most popular large breed dogs at any one time were consistently on the list of breeds that bit fatally. There were a high number of fatal bites from Doberman pinschers in the 1970s, for example, because Dobermans were very popular at that time and there were more Dobermans around. The number of fatal bites from pit bulls rose in the 1980s for the same reason, and the number of bites from rottweilers in the 1990s. The study noted that there are no reliable statistics for nonfatal dog bites, so there is no way to know how often smaller breeds are biting.

### **Owner responsibilities**

This study supports what many veterinarians have believed for years: nearly any dog can be aggressive, depending on his training and environment. Owners play a big part in making sure that their pet is safe around other people. There are several steps you can take to help ensure that your dog isn't dangerous.

\*Restrain your pet. Unrestrained dogs cause about 82 percent of all fatal bites. Keeping your dog on a strong leash whenever you're in public is a big first step toward preventing bites. Also, don't encourage strangers to interact with your dog. If you leave your dog alone outdoors, your yard needs to be enclosed with a six- to eight-foot fence, depending on your dog's size.

\*Socialize your puppy. Once your pup has been fully vaccinated, take him to puppy classes, the park, and the pet store. Take him anywhere where he can interact with people and other dogs. Praise him when he interacts well with others.

\*Spay or neuter your dog. Intact male dogs are responsible for approximately 80 percent of fatal bites. When dogs are altered, they lose some of their territorial instincts, including a lot of their territorial aggression.

\*Train him not to bite. Dogs will mouth, chew, and bite everything until you teach them that it's inappropriate. If your dog is biting you, or growling at you or other family members, distract him with a quick sound, such as a clap or a sharp "ow!" Then redirect his attention to a rawhide or chew toy. And be sure to reward him when you catch him chewing on the right things.

\*Watch your dog's behavior. This may be the most important part of preventing your dog from biting. It's easy for owners to be in denial that their sweet, furry Fido may be a threat. But if your dog growling at, snapping at, or biting family members and strangers, it is time for your veterinarian's help.

If you see signs that your dog could be aggressive or dangerous, you can ask us to set up a referral to a veterinary behavioral specialist. While your dog is being treated for aggression, be careful with him in public. Following these directions won't guarantee that your dog won't bite, but they'll certainly make it less likely. The truth is, an irresponsible owner is much more dangerous than any dog.



### **Safety On The Go**

Dogs who are riding in the backs of pickup trucks may look like they're having fun. Noses testing the wind and ears flopping, they seem to be enjoying the trip\*and they get to go places with their owners. But they're not safe: When you transport your dog in the open bed of your pickup, you endanger both your dog and other motorists.

If your truck hits a bump, or if you step on the brakes suddenly or swerve to avoid an obstacle, your dog can easily be thrown from the truck bed and onto the road. Chances are, this will injure or kill your dog. But even if it doesn't, being struck by another vehicle probably will. Also, other drivers may cause an accident by swerving to avoid hitting your dog.

If you must transport your dog in a pickup truck, put him in the cab with you in a travel crate or a pet seat belt. If you have an extended cab, have your pet ride in the back portion of the cab where he will be away from the front windshield. It is not safe for your dog to ride in the bed of a pickup even with a restraint. The Humane Society knows of no brand of

harness that has been proven safe in this situation. In fact, there have been cases where dogs restrained by leashes or harnesses have been strangled or dragged after being thrown from a truck bed.

There are other safety precautions that you should take anytime your pet goes for a ride, regardless of the type of vehicle. Be sure your dog wears a collar with an ID tag. When traveling long distances, have your dog wear two ID tags\*one with a home address and one with a destination address. Never leave your dog in a vehicle unattended. On a warm day, the temperature can reach 120°F in a matter of minutes\*even with the windows partially open.

The trip will be more enjoyable for both of you if you make sure that your dog will be safe and sound on arrival.



## **What You Should Know About Spaying or Neutering Your Pet**

MYTH: My pet will get fat and lazy.

FACT: The truth is that most pets get fat and lazy because their owners feed them too much and don't give them enough exercise.

MYTH: It's better to have one litter first.

FACT: Medical evidence indicates just the opposite. In fact, the evidence shows that females spayed before their first heat are typically healthier. Many veterinarians now sterilize dogs and cats as young as eight weeks of age. Check with your veterinarian about the appropriate time for these procedures.

MYTH: My children should experience the miracle of birth.

FACT: Even if children are able to see a pet give birth\*which is unlikely, since it usually occurs at night and in seclusion\*the lesson they will really learn is that animals can be created and discarded as it suits adults. Instead, it should be explained to children that the real miracle is life and that preventing the birth of some pets can save the lives of others.

MYTH: But my pet is a purebred.

FACT: So is at least one out of every four pets brought to animal shelters around the country. There are just too many dogs and cats\*mixed breed and purebred.

MYTH: I want my dog to be protective.

FACT: Spaying or neutering does not affect a dog's natural instinct to protect home and family. A dog's personality is formed more by genetics and environment than by sex hormones.

MYTH: I don't want my male dog or cat to feel like less of a male.

FACT: Pets don't have any concept of sexual identity or ego. Neutering will not change a pet's basic personality. He doesn't suffer any kind of emotional reaction or identity crisis when neutered.

MYTH: But my dog (or cat) is so special, I want a puppy (or kitten) just like her.

FACT: A dog or cat may be a great pet, but that doesn't mean her offspring will be a carbon copy. Professional animal breeders who follow generations of bloodlines can't guarantee they will get just what they want out of a particular litter. A pet owner's chances are even slimmer. In fact, an entire litter of puppies or kittens might receive all of a pet's (and her mate's) worst characteristics.

MYTH: It's too expensive to have my pet spayed or neutered.

FACT: The cost of spaying or neutering depends on the sex, size, and age of the pet, your veterinarian's fees, and a number of other variables. But whatever the actual price, spay or neuter surgery is a one-time cost\*a relatively small cost when compared to all the benefits. It's a bargain compared to the cost of having a litter and ensuring the health of the mother and litter; two months of pregnancy and another two months until the litter is weaned can add up to significant veterinary bills and food costs if complications develop. Most importantly, it's a very small price to pay for the health of your pet and the prevention of the births of more unwanted pets.

MYTH: I'll find good homes for all the puppies and kittens.

FACT: You may find homes for all of your pet's litter. But each home you find means one less home for the dogs and cats in shelters who need good homes. Also, in less than one year's time, each of your pet's offspring may have his or her own litter, adding even more animals to the population. The problem of pet overpopulation is created and perpetuated one litter at a time.



## In Loving Memory of THOR, and All Those Companions Waiting for Us

Just this side of heaven is a place called Rainbow Bridge.

When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, that pet goes to Rainbow Bridge.

There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together.

There is plenty of food, water and sunshine, and our friends are warm and comfortable.

All the animals who had been ill and old are restored to health and vigor; those who were hurt or maimed are made whole and strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by.

The animals are happy and content, except for one small thing; they each miss someone very special to them, who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are intent; His eager body quivers. Suddenly he begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster.

You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. The happy kisses rain upon your face; your hands again caress the beloved head, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross Rainbow Bridge together....

## Summer is Heartworm Season



## Protect your dog with Interceptor



# One Little Flea Can Lead to One **BIG** Infestation