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Emerging leptospirosis in Sydney dogs – seroprevalence and silent shedders of *Leptospira* in dogs and cats

INFORMATION STATEMENT FOR ANIMAL RESEARCH PROJECTS

(1) What is the project about?

You and your animal(s) are invited to take part in a research project about emerging Leptospirosis in Sydney dogs.

Leptospirosis is a potentially fatal bacterial zoonotic infection that can cause acute kidney failure and liver disease in dogs. Dogs can become infected by contact with urine from rodents or indirectly via contaminated water or soil. Clinically healthy dogs and cats can shed the bacteria posing a potential risk to people coming in contact with the urine. Prevention of leptospirosis is achieved by limiting contact to sources of infection and vaccination. Clinical leptospirosis has rarely been reported in Sydney. Therefore, dogs are not routinely vaccinated. The vaccine currently available protects against one specific variety of the bacteria (serovar), and we do not know if this is the only type currently causing problems in Sydney. Given that cross protection against multiple varieties does not occur, assessing the potential need for broader vaccines available overseas is critical to the protection of pets and indirectly humans.

Six confirmed cases of canine leptospirosis have been reported in the Inner West recently, 4 in the past 2 months. All dogs died or were euthanized due to a poor prognosis. Theories have emerged that the recent outbreak might be due to major construction occurring in Sydney and increased exposure to rats and contamination of bodies of water, however the current source of infection is unknown.

Aims of this study therefore are to Investigate the geographic distribution of the recent outbreak of canine leptospirosis in Sydney; determine which varieties of the bacteria are involved and

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conduct a pilot regional blood sample based study of leptospira exposure in healthy and in-contact dogs and cats.

The recent outbreak of fatal leptospirosis poses not only a risk to unvaccinated dogs but also to their owners. This research project will enable us to identify the causative serovar and investigate the epidemiology of this outbreak which is essential for an effective preventative plan. Identifying the serovar is of utmost importance to determine if the current vaccine should be effective. Should other serovars be involved development of a new vaccine or import of vaccines from other countries might be necessary.

This Information Statement tells you about the research project. Knowing what is involved for you and your animal(s) will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research project is voluntary. By giving your consent to take part in this project you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to your animal(s) taking part in the research project as outlined below.

(2) Who is carrying out the project?

The project is being carried out by the following researchers:

- Dr Christine Griebisch, Dr med vet DipECVIM-CA, Unit Head, Specialist and Senior Lecturer in Small Animal Medicine
- Dr Nicolle Kirkwood, BSc BVM (Hons) MANZCVS (Small Animal Medicine), Unit Head and Senior Clinical Veterinary Registrar in Primary Care
- Dr Claire Wylie, BVM&S, MSc, PhD, MRCVS, Senior Lecturer in Evidence Based Practice
- Dr Peter Bennett BVSc FANZCVS DACVIM, Senior Lecturer in Oncology and Small Animal Medicine

(3) What does the project involve?

After informed consent is given a blood sample will be taken. The blood sample will be taken from the jugular vein (vein in the neck) or a vein on one of the legs. The hair over the area of blood collection might be clipped and the skin disinfected with alcohol. A free catch urine sample will be obtained with a kidney dish when they urinate or taken from the bladder with a needle and syringe. To do so your dog will be walked outside, and the urine will be collected with the kidney dish. Alternatively, you can catch the urine yourself and bring it in to our clinic or to your local veterinarian.

The samples collected will be stored in a freezer until analysis. We aim to analyse all samples within the next few weeks.

(4) How much time will participating in the project take?

Blood and urine collection are very quick procedures. It should take no longer than a few minutes.

(5) Can I withdraw my animal(s) from the project?

Being in this project is completely voluntary – you are not under any obligation to consent. If you do consent, you can withdraw your animal(s) at any time without affecting your relationship with the University of Sydney or your veterinarian. Once the samples have been analysed results will be used for research purposes. You and your animal will however remain anonymous.

(6) Are there are risks or costs associated with being in the project?

There are no risks associated with being in the project. In very rare occasions we can see some minor bleeding, bruising or a rash in the area of blood collection.

There are no financial costs of project participation for you.

(7) Are there any benefits associated with being in the project?

After we have analysed the samples, we are happy to share the results with you. As dogs and cats can be silent shedders (excreting leptospires in the urine without being clinically sick) we would recommend treating your pet with antibiotics and would advise you to see your general practitioner if results are positive.

We hope to be able to identify the serovar of the *Leptospira* organism involved in the recent outbreak. This is important as the currently available vaccine in Australia does not cover all potentially involved serovars. Therefore, we might need to import vaccines used in other countries or might need to investigate developing a new vaccine.

(8) What will happen to information about my animal(s) collected during the project?

The researchers involved in the project will have access to the information collected about your animal. The information will be kept confidential and will not be shared with other parties. The information will be stored in the clinical records of your pet and in tables created by the main researcher. The information will be stored indefinitely. We aim is to present results at national and international conferences and to publish them in scientific journals. Relevant information will also be shared with the public. The information collected in this project might form the base of some future research.

(9) Can I tell other people about the project?

Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the project.

(10) Will I be told the results of the project?

We are happy to share results of your pet with you. We do however not know how fast we will be able to analyse the samples so it might be a few months before you hear back from us.

If you want to received results of your pet please indicate so on the consent form and let us know which is your preferred contact method.

(11) What if I require further information about the project?

When you have read this information, Dr Christine Griebisch or Dr Nicolle Kirkwood will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Dr Christine Griebisch, Specialist in Senior Lecturer in Small Animal Medicine, email: christine.griebisch@sydney.edu.au, phone 02 9351 3437.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the project?

Research involving animals in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called an Animal Ethics Committee (AEC). The ethical aspects of this project have been approved by the AEC of the University of Sydney [*INSERT protocol number once approval is obtained*]. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the project according to the *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (2013)*.

If you are concerned about the way this project is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the project, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the project title and number.

Animal Welfare Veterinarian, University of Sydney:

- **Telephone:** +61 2 8627 8174
- **Email:** animal.ethics@sydney.edu.au

This information sheet is for you to keep