

Disease Risks for Dogs in Social Settings



The following is a list of the most common diseases to which your dog(s) may be exposed at a dog gathering. There may be specific risks in your area that are not listed. For more information about specific diseases in your area, consult your veterinarian.

People can also spread some diseases (such as mange, ringworm, kennel cough and canine influenza) from dog to dog through shared brushes, collars, bedding, etc. or by petting or handling an infected dog before petting or handling another dog.

Canine distemper

Canine distemper is caused by a very contagious virus. Puppies and dogs usually become infected through virus particles in the air or in the respiratory secretions of infected dogs. Infected dogs typically develop runny eyes, fever, snotty nose, coughing, vomiting, diarrhea, seizures, and paralysis. It is often fatal.

Fortunately, there is an effective vaccine to protect your dog from this deadly disease. The canine distemper vaccine is considered a "core" vaccine and is recommended for every dog.

Canine influenza ("canine flu" or "dog flu")

Canine influenza is caused by the canine influenza virus. It is a relatively new disease in dogs. Because most dogs have not been exposed to the virus, their immune systems are not able to fully respond to the virus and many of them will become infected when they are exposed. Canine influenza is spread through respiratory secretions, contaminated objects (including surfaces, bowls, collars and leashes). The virus can survive for up to 48 hours on surfaces, up to 24 hours on clothing, and up to 12 hours on people's hands.

Dogs can be shedding the virus before they even show signs of illness, which means an apparently healthy dog can still infect other dogs. Dogs with canine influenza develop coughing, a fever and a snotty nose, which are the same signs observed when a dog has kennel cough.

There is a vaccine for canine influenza, but at this time it is not recommended for every dog. Consult your veterinarian to determine if the canine influenza vaccine is recommended for your dog.

Canine parvovirus ("parvo")

Parvo is caused by the canine parvovirus type 2. The virus is very contagious and attacks the gastrointestinal system, causing fever, vomiting and severe, often bloody, diarrhea. It is spread by direct contact between dogs as well as by contaminated stool, surfaces, bowls, collars, leashes, equipment, and the hands and clothing of people. It can also survive in the soil for years, making the virus hard to kill. Treating parvo can be very expensive and many dogs die from parvo despite intensive treatment.

Fortunately, there is a vaccine for parvo. It is considered a "core" vaccine and is recommended for every dog.

External parasites (ticks, fleas and mange)

External parasites, such as ticks, fleas and mange, are fairly common dog problems. Ticks from the environment, fleas from other dogs and the environment, and mange from other dogs pose risks at dog gatherings. Ticks can transmit diseases (see tick-borne diseases below). Fleas can transmit some types of tapeworms as well as some diseases, and they may end up infesting your home and yard if they hitchhike home on your dog(s).

There are many approved products available to **effectively prevent and treat external parasites** on dogs. Consult your veterinarian about the best product for your dog.

Cheyletiella mites cause "walking dandruff" on dogs (itching and flaky skin on the dog's trunk). They are spread from dog to dog by direct contact, and may require more aggressive treatment than fleas.

Fertilizers and pesticides

Some fertilizers and pesticides can be toxic to dogs. Avoid letting your pet walk, run, play or roam in areas that have recently been treated with fertilizers or pesticides.

Fungal infections (blastomycosis, histoplasmosis, cryptococcosis, coccidioidomycosis, etc.)

Fungal organisms in the soil can infect dogs when they eat or sniff contaminated soil. Dogs can also be infected through the skin, especially through a skin wound. The types of fungus seen vary throughout the U.S.: **histoplasmosis** is more common in the Eastern and Central U.S.; **blastomycosis** is more common in the Southeast, Southcentral and Midwest regions; **cryptococcosis** is more common in the Pacific Northwest region; and **coccidioidomycosis** is more common in the Southwest U.S. Histoplasmosis can be spread by bird or bat droppings.

In general, the fungus infects the body through the respiratory tract and causes fever, coughing, lethargy and flu-like or pneumonia-like signs. If eaten, digestive problems (e.g., pain, diarrhea) can occur. Immunosuppressed dogs (dogs whose immune systems are weakened because of disease or certain medications) are much more likely to become infected with these fungi and develop disease.

Heartworms

Heartworms are spread by mosquitoes and can cause coughing, lethargy, difficulty breathing, heart disease and death. Fortunately, there are many approved products to prevent heartworm infection. Consult your veterinarian about the best product for your dog.

Heatstroke

Heatstroke is a big risk during warm and hot weather. Remember that your dog is always wearing a fur coat and they are usually warmer than you are. A temperature that seems only a little warm to a person can be too hot for a dog. Add to that the fact that dogs at dog gatherings are often active and playing, and the heat could become deadly for your dog. **Never leave your pet in the car on warm days.** Even a 70°F day can be too hot in a car. Short-nosed breeds, such as pugs, Boston Terriers, boxers, bulldogs, etc. are more prone to heatstroke and breathing problems because they don't pant as effectively as breeds with normal-length noses.

Signs of heatstroke include excessive panting and drooling, anxiousness, weakness, abnormal gum color (darker red or even purple), collapse and death.

Any dog showing signs of heatstroke should be immediately taken to a shaded area and cooled with cold, wet towels that are wrung out and rewetted every few minutes. Running cool water over the dog's body and quickly wiping it away (so the water absorbs the skin's heat and is immediately wiped away) can also help. Transport the dog to a veterinarian immediately, because heatstroke can rapidly become deadly.

Injuries

Any time unfamiliar dogs and/or dogs with different temperaments are mixed, there is a risk of conflict and injury. Bite wounds should be immediately evaluated by a veterinarian and efforts should be made to determine the rabies vaccination status of the biting dog. Overweight dogs and dogs accustomed to more sedentary lifestyles should be encouraged to become more active, but excessive activity can put them at risk of injury to joints, bones or muscles. If your dog is overweight and/or you plan to increase its activity level, consult with your veterinarian about the best plan to get your dog active with the least risk of injury.

Intestinal parasites



Intestinal parasites such as roundworms, hookworms, whipworms and tapeworms lay eggs that are passed in the dog's stool and infect other dogs when they eat contaminated soil, lick contaminated soil or paws, or drink water contaminated with the stool from infected dogs. Tapeworms are spread when dogs eat fleas, lice, or rodents infected with tapeworms.

These worms can cause malnutrition (because they steal nutrients as food is being digested) and diarrhea, and hookworms can cause blood loss. There are many products available to treat worms, and you should consult their veterinarian for the appropriate products for your pets.

Coccidia and *Giardia* are single-celled parasites that damage the lining of the intestine. Dogs can become infected with coccidia by eating infected soil or licking contaminated paws or fur. Puppies are at the highest risk of infection and illness.

Kennel cough

Kennel cough can be caused by a combination of viruses and bacteria. It is very contagious and your dog can become infected if it comes into contact with an infected dog. Dogs with kennel cough may not seem ill in the early stages of the disease but they can still infect other dogs. Most commonly, dogs with kennel cough will have a snotty nose and a dry, hacking cough.

There are vaccines for kennel cough, but not all dogs need to receive the vaccine. Consult your veterinarian about whether or not the kennel cough (*Bordetella*) vaccine is right for your dog.

Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is caused by species of the *Leptospira* bacteria. The bacteria are shed in the urine of infected animals, and animals and people usually become infected by drinking contaminated water or coming into contact with contaminated soil or food. Dogs infected with *Leptospira* may develop fever, muscle weakness, vomiting, lethargy, abdominal pain, and kidney or liver failure. There is a vaccine for leptospirosis; consult your veterinarian about whether or not the vaccine is appropriate for your dog. Some canine distemper combination vaccines include a *Leptospira* vaccine.

Rabies

Any mammal is capable of being infected with the virus that causes **rabies**. Most dog parks and organized dog gatherings require proof of rabies vaccination, but some do not. Rabies is caused by the rabies virus and is 100% fatal in animals once they start to show signs of disease. The virus is spread by saliva, either by a bite from an infected animal or by saliva contaminating a skin wound. In addition, any contact with wildlife (including bats) can introduce the risk of rabies infection. Raccoons, skunks and other wild animals can carry the rabies virus and may be present in areas where dogs gather.

Fortunately, rabies infection is preventable with vaccination. Many local and state governments require regular rabies vaccination for dogs.

Regional wildlife risks and feral animals

Wildlife diseases that can infect dogs increase the risk of diseases, such as **rabies** and **plague**, as well as the risk of injury. In some areas of the U.S., prairie dogs often invade dog parks. Prairie **rabies** carry rabies, which can carry the bacteria that causes plague. Skunks, raccoons, foxes, feral cats and pigs, and other wildlife can also carry rabies and other diseases that can infect dogs. Feral dogs present disease and injury risks.

Ringworm

Although its name suggests it's a worm, ringworm is actually due to fungal infection of the skin. It can be spread by contact with an infected dog, its bedding or something that has come in contact with the infected dog. The fungus can also survive in the soil. Ringworm gets its name because it often causes circular patches of hair loss. Some dogs will excessively scratch the areas, while others may not be itchy. Many dogs will recover without treatment, but they are often treated to prevent them from spreading the infection to other dogs or to people.

Tick-borne diseases (hemobartonellosis, babesiosis, ehrlichiosis, rickettsial diseases such as Lyme disease, and others)

A variety of diseases that can infect dogs are spread by ticks, including **Lyme disease** and many others. Some diseases are more common in specific areas of the U.S. These diseases can cause anemia (blood loss), lameness, weakness, lethargy, organ failure, and even death. The best way to prevent these diseases is to prevent tick bites. There are many products available that reduce tick bites and kill ticks on dogs; consult your veterinarian about the best product for your dog. Check your dog for ticks after any outside dog gatherings and remove the tick(s) as soon as possible.

Toxic plants

Toxic plants can cause a variety of illnesses. Some ornamental plants can be very toxic to animals. Cocoa mulch is also toxic to dogs. For more information about toxic plants, visit the **ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center** Web site.

See Also:

- [Dogs' Social Lives and Disease Risks](#)
- [Protect Your Dog, Yourself and Others](#)
- [Disease Risks for People](#)

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