

# ORAH Info:

## My Dog Is Positive for Lyme Exposure-- Now What?



Lyme disease is very difficult to study, and few actual facts are known. Often we are working with educated guesses from reliable experts, but there is a lot of controversy at even the highest levels of veterinary medicine. With that in mind, here is some basic information along with our current recommendations.

### TESTING FOR LYME EXPOSURE

Lyme disease is caused by bacteria that are very hard to find with standard cultures. Tests look for something that is easier to find: antibodies in the dog's blood. In other words, the test measures a dog's reaction to the bacteria. The test may be positive about three weeks after exposure. The test does not show whether the bacteria themselves are present, nor whether the dog will get sick. Antibodies from a dog's reaction to a tick bite are not known to protect your dog against future exposures or illness.

### LYME DISEASE IN DOGS

Over 90% of dogs who test positive for Lyme exposure will never be sick. Retrievers (Labs and Golden Retrievers) and Shetland Sheepdogs are believed to be more likely to get sick than other breeds. Of the few dogs who are ill, most have a syndrome of fever, joint pain, and feeling "under the weather." These symptoms usually appear 2-5 months after exposure.

Very rarely, dogs who test positive for Lyme exposure will lose protein in their urine, and their kidneys fail. The diagnosis is made when they start to show symptoms such as drinking and urinating a lot, vomiting, and reduced appetite. Little is known about this form of the disease, because it has been difficult to study in the laboratory setting. These dogs usually die of their disease within a few weeks to months after diagnosis, no matter how they are treated.

### OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUR DOG

According to most veterinary experts, only the small number of Lyme-positive dogs who are actually sick should be treated with antibiotics. For dogs with joint pain and fever, four weeks of antibiotics are recommended; symptoms should improve within a day or two of starting medication.

Why do some dogs get fatal kidney failure, and is there anything we can do to prevent this? Nobody knows the answer. Experts suggest that if we can find these dogs early, before they feel sick, we might be able to prevent or at least slow the progression of their illness. This is why we recommend checking urine protein levels in dogs who are Lyme positive, even if they have no symptoms.

For urine testing, please bring a sample of your dog's urine in a clean container (it does not have to be sterile, but should be thoroughly washed and dried before use). The first morning sample is best. The sample should be no more than a few hours old when we get it. If abnormal levels of protein are seen, we will discuss the results with you and may recommend further testing to evaluate your dog's kidney function.

### THE BEST TREATMENT IS PREVENTION

Since Lyme disease in its most devastating form can be fatal, the best solution is to prevent exposure. During tick season, your dog should use a topical product. Both K9 Advantix and Frontline kill ticks; K9 Advantix actually repels ticks, and may provide more protection. The highest level of protection is provided by a prescription-only collar. Our staff can help you decide what is right for your dog. Please feel free to discuss vaccination with a veterinarian if you are interested.