



State of Louisiana
Department of Health and Hospitals
Center for Community and Preventive Health

DANGERS TO DOGS SWIMMING IN NATURAL WATER BODIES

Ear infections

Ear infections are a risk to dogs that accumulate water from any source in the ear. Even a bath with very clean water can result in an ear infection. Swimming in natural water sources (ponds, streams, lakes, bayous, rivers, etc.) also can cause ear infections. Ear infections after swimming can often be prevented by cleaning out the dog's ear with an alcohol based ear cleaner or other veterinarian recommended ear cleaner.

Infectious diseases

Many different types of infectious organisms can be transmitted to dogs from natural water bodies. The most common problem in the dog resulting from exposure to these organisms is diarrhea. Dogs usually acquire the infection from ingesting the organism. Swimming in natural bodies of water is a form of exercise for your pet, and pets often become thirsty. Attempt to discourage your dog from drinking the water in which it swims. It is a good idea to provide your pet with clean water or ice that you bring along with you.

Leptospirosis

One particularly serious infectious organism potentially found in natural bodies of water in Louisiana is the bacterium, *Leptospira interrogans*, which can cause a disease known as leptospirosis. Leptospirosis is shed by other animals, primarily rodents, in urine. Besides discouraging your pet from ingesting the water in which they swim, dogs with cuts, scrapes, scratches, or any skin condition, should never be permitted to swim in natural bodies of water. *Leptospira* organisms can be ingested or can enter through non-intact skin. A vaccine is available to protect your pet from leptospirosis. All dogs that swim in natural water bodies should be administered this vaccine according to directions from your veterinarian.

Skin infections

Skin infections have also been a problem in some animals that swim in natural water bodies. Again, dogs with cuts, scrapes, scratches, or any skin condition, should never be permitted to swim in natural bodies of water. It is a good idea to bathe your dog after swimming in natural bodies of water, especially those that are frequented by other pets or animals, or those that contain decaying organic matter such as leaves and twigs.

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