Greyhound adoption is a worldwide effort. It is easy to trace thousands of miles in a weekend bringing new Greyhounds to an adoption group. The ease of travel also increases the possibility of exposure to new diseases. When we bring Galgos and Spanish Greyhounds to the United States or to other countries, we may bring with them leishmaniasis. This disease is rare in the United States but may be encountered in Spanish dogs. What causes leishmaniasis? How is it diagnosed? How is it treated? Leishmaniasis is an ancient, parasitic disease carried by sandflies. It is caused by the genus of protozoa Leishmania. Several species of Leishmania are present in different areas of the world, and they produce different forms of the disease. In Texas, Leishmaniasis is transmitted to humans and animals primarily by the biting sandfly. The disease is also zoonic, which means that it can be transmitted from animals to humans. The organism lives in an infected body’s macrophages, immune cells that house foreign invaders in an attempt to fight disease. Leishmania protozoa are able to survive this attack by the immune system. They survive by evading and capturing the cells. Then they travel through the bloodstream, where they may be ingested by biting sandflies, who bite other bodies and start the cycle over. Not all dogs exposed to Leishmania become sick. Forty to 50 percent of those exposed to the organism without showing clinical signs are immune from any further infections. Other dogs, once infected, may exhibit the clinical signs of cutaneous leishmaniasis; these include progressive symmetrical hair loss, itchy skin, and ulcers of the nose, eyelids, and ears. The signs of visceral leishmaniasis may include diarrhea, kidney failure, bone infection, eye infection, and arthritis, depending on the infected area. The dog exhibits weight loss, muscle atrophy, and general malaise. Leishmaniasis is diagnosed by determining potential exposure to the organism. Most dogs with leishmaniasis have been exposed globally, meaning many more antibodies in the blood because the body is trying to fight the organism. The dog should be tested for antibodies specific for Leishmania. The presence of antibodies does not specifically confirm the diagnosis, only that the dog has been exposed to the organism. The dog could have been exposed long ago and developed immunity to the disease. If the dog is brought in for clinical examination. It is not a cure. It reduces the presence of the organism in the dog but does not eliminate it. Dogs may need to be treated with allopurinol for life to control disease in check. Ganciclovir, an anti- viral medicine, can be used to treat the disease. The drug is given orally twice daily for 21 days. The injection sites can become irritated from the medication, so the injections are given.
Leishmaniasis may be treated, but the attending veterinarian should be made aware of the Greyhound's possible exposure, since testing for this exposure is not a typical procedure.

Allopurinol is about 15 cents per day. Glucantime® is not commercially available in the United States or Canada at this time. Every one to two months during treatment, the dog should be evaluated for increasing globulins and negative PCR tests. If two PCR tests are negative six months apart, the dog may be considered to be cured of the disease. If the PCR test is positive and the globulins are increasing, then the patient may be relapsing, and further treatment (such as another course of Glucantime®) is indicated.

Leishmaniasis is a disease that may be present in Galgos and Spanish Greyhounds. It may be treated, but the attending veterinarian should be made aware of the dog's possible exposure to Leishmania, since testing for this exposure is not a typical procedure. Communicating with the veterinarian about this risk may save time and frustration for the owner and veterinarian, allowing a quicker diagnosis and treatment.

Although treatment options in the United States are few at present, research into medical response to leishmaniasis is ongoing. Knowledge of leishmaniasis is much greater in countries where the disease is more prevalent. Many foreign references discuss the effectiveness of treatment in terms of cure rates, rather than disease management.


To learn more about leishmaniasis on the Internet, consult the following:


*Canine Leishmaniasis: an Emerging Threat,* (www.canleish.com/konoha/la/further/D00_02_5_5.html), October 25, 2000, by Jeff Weyman, DVM.


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