

Leishmania donovani

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Now you know what causes dum dum fever. The disease caused by *Leishmania* is also called leishmaniasis or kala azar. This parasite is not normally found in North America, although there have been a few cases diagnosed in Oklahoma and New York. It has been found in dogs that have traveled to South America, where it is quite common in dogs. It is a serious disease in humans.

Leishmania is a parasite of blood cells and also affects the spleen and liver, and is transmitted by blood-sucking flies. Signs of disease include anemia, loss of appetite, severe weight loss, fever, bleeding tendencies, and enlarged liver, spleen, and lymph nodes. Many dogs develop skin lesions and some have swollen limbs and joints. Inflammation of the eye can also occur. The time between infection and the appearance of disease can sometimes be up to 7 years.

Leishmaniasis is diagnosed by finding the parasite in the cells of the blood, spleen, liver, or lymph nodes. There is also a serologic test available that aids in diagnosis.

The drugs used to treat this infection in people are not as effective in dogs. If untreated, 70-90% of infected animals die. If treated, 90% recover but many still harbor the parasite. Because it is such a serious disease in people, euthanasia of infected dogs is sometimes recommended.