

# Recent research into pig-hunting dogs reveals disease risks



The health and husbandry of pig-hunting dogs in north Queensland was investigated. It was revealed that pig-hunting dogs have an increased risk of exposure to infectious diseases such as brucellosis, coxiellosis (Q Fever) and leptospirosis. These diseases are also zoonotic, meaning they can be passed from animals to humans. Pig-hunting dogs in Queensland were also found to be at high risk for canine heartworm disease.

## What was done?

This study was conducted by Dr Bronwyn Orr as part of her PhD project through the Sydney School of Veterinary Science at The University of Sydney. It involved collecting blood, urine and faeces samples from 106 healthy dogs that were actively pig-hunting from central, north and far north Queensland. These samples were tested for canine heartworm disease, leptospirosis, brucellosis and coxiellosis (Q Fever).

## What was found?

- 12.5% of pig-hunting dogs from the study region had heartworm, with more than 1 in 5 dogs from central Queensland recording a positive result.
- Roughly 1 in 4 unvaccinated dogs were seropositive to *Leptospira* spp. antigen, which meant they had recently been either exposed to, or were infected with, the bacteria responsible for leptospirosis.
- 4.2% of dogs tested positive to *Brucella suis*, the bacteria responsible for brucellosis and almost 1 in 5 dogs were seropositive to *Coxiella burnetii*, the bacteria that causes Q Fever.

## Key points

- Pig-hunting dogs in Queensland have an increased risk of heartworm disease, leptospirosis, brucellosis and Q Fever
- Hunters should take steps to reduce the risk of these diseases to their dogs
  - Get dogs vaccinated against leptospirosis
  - Use heartworm preventatives
  - Avoid feeding raw offal to dogs
  - Consider desexing dogs
- Hunters could consider taking steps to reduce the risk of these diseases to themselves
  - Discuss Q Fever vaccination suitability with GP
  - Wear PPE when butchering pigs
  - Avoid handling raw offal
  - Take care around whelping bitches

## What can hunters do to reduce the risk to their dogs (and themselves)?

It is recommended that pig-hunting dogs get vaccinated for leptospirosis, using heartworm preventatives, avoiding feeding raw offal to dogs and to consider desexing hunting animals to reduce the risk of coxiellosis and brucellosis. It's important to take care when hunting bitches are whelping, as this can be a key transmission period for brucellosis and coxiellosis. Hunters should discuss the suitability of Q Fever vaccination with their GP, and take precautions when dealing with feral pigs – using gloves where possible, wash hands thoroughly, and avoid handling offal.

## DISEASE RISKS FOR PIG-HUNTING DOGS

