

Our children keep having strep throat infections and have been on antibiotics several times this year. Is it possible that they are getting the infection from our dog? Can he have a throat culture done on him?

This is a common question where it helps if the family veterinarian is involved with health issues of the human family members. Zoonotic diseases are those that are spread from animals to humans, and generally veterinarians have more training in this area than physicians. In the case of one of our clients last week, their pediatrician recommended having their dog tested for a strep infection. This is not generally advisable.

Years ago, veterinarians did test a family dog or cat for strep in a household with recurrent infections. If the pet's culture was positive for strep, we thought the pet could be a carrier and source of infection in the family. Further research and refinement of testing methods now show us that there are different types of strep bacteria and a specific one that causes human strep throat infections as well as other more serious diseases in people. This organism is classified as Group A strep, and although dogs may have strep cultured from their throat, it is very unlikely to be Group A. Group A streptococci can be found in cultures of as many as 20% of healthy children. These children act as carriers with the bacteria spreading from person to person through saliva or nasal discharge. Healthy adults have a lower incidence of having a positive culture for the organism. It is most likely if Group A strep was cultured from the family members and the dog, the dog may have actually gotten the bacteria from the people in the house who are carrying it.

It is best to have your veterinarian discuss this with your pediatrician, prior to performing potentially unnecessary tests on your dog.

Francine K. Rattner, VMD

South Arundel Veterinary Hospital