

Canine Flu

One of the members of our group had 5 dogs with this last week. They were very ill, but are recovering nicely. She got early care. Our vet has seen a lot of these cases the past month. I suggest strongly that you avoid dog parks right now.

Be careful out there!

1. DISEASE DESCRIPTION: Canine influenza is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by an influenza Type A virus. Genetic analysis shows that the canine influenza virus is closely related to equine influenza virus. Death is unusual but stems from respiratory complications and is most common in the very old and very young. Infection rate is high but 20% to 50% will simply make antibodies and clear the infection without any signs of illness at all. The other 50% to 80% will get symptoms of the "flu." They will have fevers, listlessness, coughing and a snotty nose. Most dogs will recover with supportive treatment (antibiotics). A small percentage of dogs will actually get pneumonia. These dogs are those at risk for death and support becomes more aggressive; hospitalization, IV therapy, etc; Most of these dogs will recover as well as long as they receive proper care. The incubation period is 2 to 5 days and the course of infection lasts 2 to 4 weeks. Because this is an emerging disease, few dogs will have immunity to it and there is currently no vaccine. This means that any dog is a candidate for infection.

The point is not to ignore a coughing dog. Do not allow your dog to socialize with coughing dogs. If your dog develops a cough, snotty nose and listlessness, see your vet. A chest x-ray may be ordered and hospitalization considered.

2. HOW IS THE DISEASE TRANSMITTED? Dogs that are infected will shed virus in body secretions whether or not they appear to be sick. Virus transmission can occur from direct contact with an infected dog or with its secretions. Kennel workers have been known to bring the virus home accidentally; as the virus persists on toys, bowls, collars, leashes etc. After a dog has recovered, immunity appears to last at least 2 years.

3. HOW ARE DOGS TESTED FOR CANINE INFLUENZA? The most reliable test is a blood test for antibodies against the influenza virus. Ideally, a second sample is submitted approximately 2 weeks later. ; The change in antibody titer is what clinches the diagnosis. People cannot get infected by this virus.

4. DOES VACCINATION AGAINST KENNEL COUGH (BORDETELLA) OR PARAINFLUENZA OFFER ANY PROTECTION AGAINST CANINE INFLUENZA? No. These are all completely different infections but; work on the development of a canine flu vaccine is underway.

5. PREVENTIVE MEASURES: Any dog with clinical signs should be quarantined. Canine influenza is easily killed by most disinfectants (quaternary ammonium compounds and bleach solutions), and does not survive well outside the host. Regular disinfecting of cages, kennels, feeding utensils, etc and regular hand washing by personnel is advised. However, effective vaccination of other respiratory pathogens may allow clinicians to rule out diseases such as "kennel cough". Dogs that are scheduled for boarding should be vaccinated against "kennel cough" 2 weeks prior to boarding. Dogs admitted to shelters should be vaccinated on admission.