



Canine Influenza

Canine influenza, the dog flu, is highly contagious and caused by an influenza A virus. It acts like the flu in humans, though, fortunately, we can't get the dog version. They are different viruses.

There are two strains of the dog flu called H3N8 and H3N2. The H3N8 strain was first seen in Florida in 2004. Since then it has been diagnosed in most states. The H3N2 strain originally was discovered in dogs in Asia in 2006 but an outbreak occurred in Chicago in 2015. In early 2016, a group of cats at a shelter in Indiana became sick with the H3N2 strain of dog flu. This is the only report of the dog flu in cats at this time.

Signs



The virus is easily spread through coughing, barking, sneezing, by direct contact, contaminated surfaces (such as leashes), or by people going back and forth between dogs. Dog flu can occur year

round. A dog will show signs of illness two to four days after being exposed to the virus and can spread the disease before they are sick. They can continue to spread the disease for a few weeks. This means all dogs should be isolated for at least 21 days.

Most dogs will only have a mild illness and 20-25% won't show signs at all. The most common sign is coughing similar to "kennel cough". The cough tends to persist for 2-3 weeks and may not improve with treatment. Dogs can also have an eye or nose discharge, sneezing, tiredness, or a reduced appetite. Some will develop a fever and, occasionally, pneumonia. In a few cases, the flu can be fatal.

Diagnosis

Dog flu can be diagnosed with nasal swabs in the first few days of illness or with blood tests. A diagnosis is important since the dog needs to be isolated for so long. When you bring your dog to the vet, you may be asked to keep your dog in the car and the Dr. will examine your dog there. This is to avoid bringing the virus into the veterinary clinic and exposing other dogs to it.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment to get rid of the virus. Much of the treatment is based on reducing stress and supplements to help the immune system. Antibiotics are often used to avoid or treat a bacterial infection that can develop along with the flu. Keeping dogs isolated from other dogs for three weeks is important as is hand washing and cleaning anything that comes in contact with the sick dog.

Prevention

There are vaccines available for both of the dog flu strains. The vaccines require a booster three weeks after the first dose is given and the dog won't be protected until another week after the booster. Vaccinate your dog BEFORE an outbreak occurs! Flu vaccines may not completely prevent infection, but will reduce the severity and duration of the illness. Vaccines are recommended for dogs that spend time with other dogs. This includes boarding, grooming, doggy day care, and dog parks.

