

ACH-OO!

Your Pets Can Catch Colds, Too!

Flu season strikes every year, and we all notice everyone also begins to come down with a cold at about the same time. What you might not realize is that your pet can catch a cold, too. Dogs and cats suffer from upper respiratory infections at any time of the year. These viruses are highly contagious and spread quickly. The obvious places pets catch such viruses is in surroundings in which they are around lots of animals, including boarding kennels or grooming salons. When veterinarians offer grooming and boarding services, they require that all pets be current on vaccinations to prevent the introduction of such illnesses at their clinics.

What many people do not realize is how easily these diseases can be spread by doing ordinary things. These viruses are airborne and can be spread by the wind. On a breezy day, a coughing cat down the block can infect your cat if it is outdoors or even in your own lanai. A dog out for a walk may want to sniff where other canines have been or may meet another dog face to face, but it is best if you make them keep their distance. Unfortunately, many dog parks do not insure that all pets that play there are current on vaccines to avoid infection. And, although many parks, beaches and other public places have water bowls and fountains for your dog to enjoy a nice drink after a romp in the park, it is best to avoid such communal drinking spots. I recommend bringing your own water bowl or Frisbee from which your pet can drink.

If your pet does contract an upper respiratory infection, you will know it within a few days when

symptoms begin to become apparent. Dogs present with a harsh, hacking cough that keeps everyone awake at night and gives rise to the phrase "kennel cough." With a large sinus system in their heads, cats usually start off with sneezing fits, but the condition can quickly exacerbate into red, swollen eyes (conjunctivitis), congested nostrils, fever and ulcers in the mouth that eventually can inhibit eating or drinking, which just makes them sicker.

Young animals are most at risk, so it is important to vaccinate puppies and kittens on a veterinarian-recommended schedule, without delay. Older pets can get sick as well, so keeping current on vaccinations is critical. Most people know sinusitis if you wait too long to receive medical attention for your pet. These viruses tend to be species specific, so your dog cannot give its cold to you or your cat, and vice versa. That is good news, because most pets have "barnyard manners" and will sneeze and cough right in your face. This may, in fact, be their own way of letting you know they need to see a doctor!