

Canine Influenza-Don't get Complacent!

Canine Influenza, or "Dog Flu," has made big headlines several times during the past couple of years. Most recently it was in May of this year when the newest strain, H3N2, infected dogs attending some dog shows in Georgia and other parts of Florida and then traveled back to our communities. In fact, we did have some dogs that tested positive in both Sarasota and Manatee counties. That outbreak affected 10 southern and eastern states, but has now spread northward and at the end of July, seven dogs in Minnesota tested positive. The number of infected dogs is still growing.

The H3N2 strain that emerged in this country in 2015 has now infected thousands of dogs in 30 states. The original strain, H3N8, is still around and is infecting dogs as well. Since we live in Florida, where people and their pets visit from all over the country, it is critical that all pet owners know about this virus and learn what steps can be taken to protect our pets. Information for pet owners about canine influenza can be found at the following link provided by the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine: <https://vetmed-hospitals.sites.medinfo.ufl.edu/files/2017/05/Info-for-Pet-Owners-on-Canine-Influenza-1.pdf>

The canine flu spreads easily from dog to dog for two reasons- it is airborne from coughing, and it survives on any surface- including clothes, floors, furniture, countertops and more- for up to 48 hours. If your dog begins to experience any of the symptoms listed below, be sure to contact your veterinarian immediately and

schedule an appointment:

- **Loss of appetite**
- **Lethargy**
- **Persistent coughing**
- **Sneezing & eye discharge**
- **Fever that may vary between 104 and 106 degrees**
- **Rapid or difficult breathing**
- **Clear nasal discharge that eventually develops into a thick, yellowish-greenish mucus**

Protecting Your Pet

The most important step pet owners can take to protect their dogs is to vaccinate them against both canine influenza viruses. There is a manufacturer that produces such a vaccine. Whether it is the combination vaccine, one of the single strain vaccines or even a human influenza vaccine, it is true that the vaccine may not completely prevent infection, but it will make it less likely. Additionally, if a vaccinated dog does contract canine influenza, the symptoms are much more likely to be milder and the illness will not last as long as it would if the pet had not been vaccinated. This is important because 20 percent of the dogs who develop more serious symptoms and progress to pneumonia are the ones most at risk of succumbing to the complications and dying.

Common Sense & Sound Advise

Other steps you can take to protect your pet include developing an awareness of your dog's lifestyle and carefully monitoring where you take your pet. Dogs with social lifestyles who participate in group events or gather in places with multiple pets, such as day care centers, boarding establishments, grooming businesses, dog shows and competitions, dog parks and pet stores, etc., are at a higher risk of exposure. Before taking your dog out to play and socialize, be sure to ask appropriate questions, such as if canine flu vaccines are required at the facility you are visiting. We, in fact, require the vaccine for dogs and for all canines that board with us at Sarasota Veterinary Center.

Rely on your common sense to help you to decide if you should allow your dog to participate in some activities, travel with you to other localities or socialize with other dogs. Pay attention to the news, and be extra cautious if you hear of or read any reports of an outbreak of canine influenza in your community, as we did in our area back in May of this year. Also, use online resources, such as the link I provided, and talk to your veterinarian if you have any questions or concerns. Remember to get the vaccine that includes both strains of the virus, as well.