**Glen Mills Veterinary Hospital**

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**Canine Influenza**

**What is canine influenza and what symptoms does it cause in dogs? Is this a seasonal problem? Is this strictly a dog problem?**

Canine influenza is a **highly contagious respiratory infection of dogs** caused by influenza virus subtype H3N8. Unlike human influenza, canine influenza is not a “seasonal” infection. Infections can occur **year round**.

Virtually all dogs exposed to the canine influenza virus become infected; about 80 percent develop a flu-like illness, while another 20 percent do not become ill though they can still shed virus. This means infected dogs that do not show clinical signs are also contagious.

Canine influenza virus causes a **flu-like illness** consisting of cough, sneezing and nasal discharge (“runny nose”). Fever can also occur, but it is usually transient and rarely noticed by pet owners. While the death rate for canine influenza is very low, the secondary pneumonia can be life-threatening in some cases. In general, the canine influenza virus does not cause a permanent infection.

To date, there is no evidence that Canine influenza virus infects people or other household pets.

**How is canine influenza transmitted?**

The most efficient transmission occurs by direct contact with infected dogs and by aerosols generated by coughing and sneezing. The virus however, can also contaminate kennel surfaces, food and water bowls, collars and leashes, and the hands and clothing of people who handle infected dogs. Fortunately, the virus is easily inactivated by washing hands, clothes and other items with soap and water.

Canine influenza can spread quickly amongst dogs contained within an affected area. Infected dogs shed virus in their respiratory secretions for 7 to 10 days, during which time the dog is contagious to other dogs. Once the virus has run its course, the dog is no longer contagious. Therefore, we recommend that dogs with canine influenza be isolated from other dogs for two weeks to err on the conservative side.

**Has canine influenza been documented in PA?**

**Yes.** The Canine Influenza Virus subtype H3N8 was first identified in January, 2004 during an outbreak of respiratory infection amongst Florida racing greyhounds. Since the first identified outbreak, there have been reports of the virus at dog race tracks, animal shelters, rescue groups, pet stores, boarding kennels and veterinary clinics. Outbreaks in pet dogs have occurred in California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, North Carolina, **New Jersey**, New York, Ohio, Oregon**, Pennsylvania**, the state of Washington, and Washington, D.C. In general, it is thought to be very prevalent in many communities in Colorado, Florida, New York and **Pennsylvania**.

**How is canine influenza diagnosed?**

Canine influenza cannot be diagnosed by clinical signs because all of the other respiratory pathogens cause similar signs of coughing, sneezing and nasal discharge. For dogs that have been ill for less than four days, veterinarians can collect swabs from the nose or throat and submit them to a diagnostic laboratory that offers a validated PCR test for canine influenza virus. The most accurate test recommended for confirmation of infection requires the collection of a small blood sample from the dog during the first week of illness, followed by collection of another sample 10 to 14 days later. The paired serum samples are submitted to a diagnostic laboratory for measurement of antibodies to CIV that were formed in response to infection.

**How is canine influenza treated?**

Since canine influenza is a viral infection, treatment consists mainly of supportive care while the virus runs its course, much like for human influenza. Our veterinarians can determine what type of supportive care is needed, including whether antibiotics should be given for secondary bacterial infections. Dogs with pneumonia most likely require more intensive care provided within the hospital.

**Is the vaccine for canine influenza required for all dogs? Should I get it for my dog?**

The canine influenza vaccine is considered an **optional vaccine**.Canine influenza is most likely to spread in facilities where dogs are housed together and where there is a high turnover of dogs in and out of the facility. Dogs in **shelters, boarding and training facilities, day care centers, veterinary clinics, pet stores and grooming parlors are at highest risk for exposure to the virus, especially if these facilities are located in communities where the virus is prevalent**. Dogs that mostly stay at home and walk around the neighborhood are at low risk. Dogs that may benefit from canine influenza vaccination include those that are already receiving the kennel cough vaccine for Bordetella because the risk groups are the same.

**How do I go about getting my dog vaccinated if I’m interested?**

If your dog is current on his/her yearly exam and vaccinations, you may simply make a technician appointment for the vaccine, in which case you pay only for the vaccine itself. Please note the initial immunization protocol requires dogs receive 2 vaccines 2-4 weeks apart and then once a year thereafter to stay protected.

If your dog is due for his/her yearly exam and vaccination update with one of our doctors, we can simply start the series or update your dog during your upcoming exam. For dogs in which this was their first vaccination, you will need to schedule a technician appointment for the booster 2-4 weeks later.

**Tell me more about the vaccine.**

In May 2009, the United States Department of Agriculture approved for licensure the first influenza vaccine for dogs. The vaccine was developed by Intervet/Schering Plough Animal Health Corporation.

The canine influenza vaccine contains inactivated whole virus, so there is no chance that the vaccine itself can cause respiratory infections. During tests to evaluate vaccine performance, there were no side effects or safety issues in a field trial that included more than 700 dogs ranging in age from six weeks to 10 years and representing 30 breeds.

The vaccine is intended as an aid in the control of disease associated with C.I.V. infection. Although the vaccine may not prevent infection, efficacy trials have shown that vaccination significantly reduces the severity and duration of clinical illness, including the incidence and severity of damage to the lungs. In addition, the vaccine reduces the amount of virus shed and shortens the shedding interval. This means that vaccinated dogs that become infected are less likely to have severe symptoms and are not as contagious to other dogs. These benefits are similar to those provided by influenza vaccines used in other species, including people.