Canine Influenza: What do I need to know?

Since May of 2017 there have been thousands of confirmed cases of canine influenza in the south and midwest including Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Texas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Louisiana, Illinois and now Ohio. While we have not seen any confirmed cases in our clinic specifically, there have been recent reports of infected pets as close as Cincinnati.

Canine Influenza is a viral infection of the respiratory system that can cause a wide range of clinical signs ranging from mild to very severe. Most patients exhibit the mild form of canine influenza that manifests as a persistent cough that does not respond to antibiotics and cough suppressants. Other signs include nasal or ocular discharge, sneezing, lethargy, poor appetite, increased respiratory rate and effort, and fever. In the most severe cases – typically in pets with advanced age, chronic disease, or immunosuppressive conditions – the disease can progress to bacterial pneumonia and death. A fatality rate of 10% in severe cases has been reported. As many as 80% of canine patients who are exposed to the virus will show signs of the disease; however, there are several patients that remain asymptomatic but serves as carriers of the virus that still allow for spread of the disease. The incubation period for the disease is 1-5 days with most patients showing signs within 2-3 days after exposure.

Diagnosis of canine influenza in dogs is achieved with nasal swabs that are submitted to a laboratory. In most cases, though, the signs are mild enough that the tests are not submitted and the pets are treated and managed symptomatically and recover well within 10-21 days of treatment. Once a diagnosis has been made it is essential that pets be isolated from all other dogs for at least 4 weeks.

Treatment for these pets is mostly supportive care: maintaining their appetite, treating secondary bacterial infections, and treating the fever and cough with oral medications. In more severe cases, pets may require hospitalization on IV fluids and medications until they have recovered enough to be released for outpatient care.

Cats can be infected with this disease and their signs are similar to that in dogs: sneezing, coughing, nasal and ocular discharge, lethargy, poor appetite, and fever. There have been no reported fatalities among infected cats and there is no vaccination for use in feline patients.

There has been no documented or known spread to humans.

With this information, our clinic is recommending that ALL dogs that have exposure to other pets on a regular basis be vaccinated with the Influenza H3N2 vaccine. This includes pets that attend day care, training, boarding, grooming, etc. The initial vaccination for pets is a two-part series: one vaccination followed by a booster 3 weeks later. After the first set, the pet is vaccinated annually.

References:

www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/Pages/Canine-Influenza

www.avma.org/KB/Resources/FAQs/Pages/Control-of-Canine-Influenza-in-Dogs

University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine. H3N2 Canine Influenza Virus Fact Sheet.