

CANINE INFLUENZA

WHAT IS CANINE INFLUENZA?

Canine influenza is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by an influenza (flu) virus. It is thought to have evolved from an equine influenza virus that "jumped species."

SPECIES/AGES AFFECTED

Virtually all dogs are susceptible; immunity has not developed in the dog population at large.

RISK OF INFECTION/EXPOSURE

The disease was first identified in racing greyhounds in Florida in 2004. It has since been reported in virtually all states within the U.S. Statistics for Canada are not readily available, but it can be assumed that the disease will be found throughout our country as well.

The disease is spread through close contact with an infected dog, sharing cages, kennels and feeding utensils, and through contact with a person who has recently handled an infected dog.

METHOD OF TRANSMISSION

An infected dog will shed the virus in its body secretions and will transmit the virus mainly through coughing and oral and nasal secretions.

PREVENTION/VACCINATION

There is no vaccine available for Canine Influenza. The best means of prevention is by avoiding contact with infected dogs.

TRANSMISSIBLE TO PEOPLE

While the potential exists (as is evidenced by the recent experience with avian influenza), there is no current concern.

CLINICAL SIGNS

Two clinical syndromes have been seen in dogs infected with the Canine Influenza.

The mild form. Dogs show a soft, moist cough that persists for 10 to 30 days. Some dogs have a dry cough similar to the "kennel cough" caused by the *Bordetella bronchiseptica* bacteria / *Parainfluenza virus* complex, resulting in misdiagnosis of the disease. Dogs with the mild form of influenza may have a secondary bacterial nasal discharge. These clinical signs are usually mild and resolve without treatment.

The severe form. Dogs develop a high fever and signs of pneumonia (rapid breathing, labored breathing, and coughing – dogs may cough up blood). These signs develop very quickly, and can lead to death in less than a day. Secondary bacterial pneumonia may be present as well. A mortality rate as high as 5-8% has been reported with the severe form of influenza, but it is generally less than 1%.

CONSEQUENCES OF ILLNESS

Somewhere between 50-80% of infected dogs show clinical signs of disease, mostly the mild form. Up to 50% of infected dogs recover without showing any signs of disease. Generally, less than 1% of infected dogs will die.

DIAGNOSIS

A blood test to detect antibodies against the virus is the most reliable method of diagnosis. A second test two weeks later showing an increase in antibody levels confirms the diagnosis. Unfortunately, laboratory facilities able to perform this testing are very limited, and the time it takes to obtain test results may be too long for dogs infected with the severe form of Canine Influenza.

TREATMENT

The mild form requires minimal supportive treatment with medications such as anti-inflammatories and cough suppressants.

With the severe form, treatment is mainly supportive with intravenous fluids and antibiotics to prevent secondary bacterial infections. A rapid onset of disease is usually matched by an equally rapid recovery if treatment is instigated.