

ORAH Info:

Canine Influenza Virus



Since its appearance in 2004, the risk of canine influenza has remained low overall, and instances of serious illness have been rare. Although influenza viruses can mutate and have been known to move from species to species, as of this moment the canine influenza virus has not been transmitted to other pets or to people.

Canine influenza is a relatively new virus which was first reported in racing greyhounds in Florida in 2004. A vaccine became available in 2009. Since the initial cases, sporadic outbreaks have occurred throughout the US. Canine influenza was not reported in Vermont until this winter, when a relatively minor outbreak occurred-- mostly focused in the Burlington area.

Signs of flu in dogs are similar to those in people: runny nose, cough and fever. Most dogs do not get terribly sick and can be treated at home with basic supportive care (keeping warm, staying well fed and well hydrated). Sometimes we use antibiotics to address secondary bacterial infections, and cough suppressants, if needed. In rare cases (1-5% of dogs with influenza) some animals may become seriously ill, require hospitalization, and could be at risk of death. As with human influenza, this is more likely in dogs who are very young, very old, or who are debilitated by other diseases.

The pattern of infection with canine influenza is similar to that of other respiratory diseases, such as kennel cough. Some dogs will be infected and shed the virus, but will show no signs of illness. The virus shedding is highest in the first 4 days after infection, before the dog begins to show clinical signs. The virus is particularly easy to transmit via bodily secretions and respiratory droplets, and can live on non-porous surfaces for 48 hours and on porous surfaces like clothing for up to 12 hours. It can be transmitted from one dog to another by breathing the same air or by playing together, especially indoors.

In general, veterinary infectious disease experts have recommended the canine influenza vaccine for dogs in states where canine influenza has been reported, and then only for dogs that come into regular contact with other dogs — show dogs and racing dogs in particular, and pets that go to dog parks, day care, or boarding kennels in areas where outbreaks are occurring.

The canine influenza vaccine does not necessarily prevent the disease, but produces what is called non-sterilizing immunity. Vaccinated animals may still be infected with the virus, may show signs of illness (which may be reduced in severity) and will shed virus if infected.

For the present time, we recommend as your best prevention avoiding kenneling and day care facilities unless absolutely necessary until the current wave of cases has subsided. If you do need to take your dog to a public facility or area where she or he will come in contact with other dogs, you may wish to vaccinate your pet, especially if she or he is at greater risk of significant illness (very old, very young, or has another concurrent disease or history of respiratory problems).

Please feel free to discuss with us on an individual basis your dog's risk versus benefit for adding the canine influenza vaccine. Remember, even with the vaccine, two injections are required 2 to 4 weeks apart and then a period of at least one week following the 2nd injection is required to achieve full immunity (3-5 weeks from the initial vaccination). Vaccinations are then repeated annually.

2386 Airport Road, Berlin, VT 05641 802-223-7765

Colleen Bloom, VMD • Karen Bradley, DVM • Anne Culp, VMD • Hannah Flynn, VMD • Hailey Gentile, DVM • Lauren Quinn, DVM