

Cancer prevalent in pets but treatable, says veterinarian

December 3 2014, by Lindsey Elliott

About 50 percent of dogs and 33 percent of cats age 10 years and older will develop cancer. Although it is very prevalent in these animals, a Kansas State University veterinarian says depending upon the type of cancer, it may be very treatable and doesn't have to be a life-limiting disease.

Mary Lynn Higginbotham, assistant professor of oncology in the university's College of Veterinary Medicine, says any breed is at risk of developing cancer. Common types of cancer found in pets are also common in humans: lymphoma, melanoma and osteosarcoma, for example.

"There are certainly some [dog breeds](#) that the Veterinary Health Center has noticed have a tendency to develop tumors, but it varies from tumor to tumor," Higginbotham said. "Osteosarcomas are the primary bone tumors we see in the limbs, most commonly in the front legs of large dog breeds like Great Danes, mastiffs, Labrador retrievers and rottweilers."

An overall change in the behavior of your animal could be an indication of [cancer](#). Symptoms to watch for include:

- Lumps or bumps that grow or change.
- Wounds that won't heal, such as on the skin of the face or the toe.
- Lameness that is persistent or recurrent.
- Unexplained weight loss.

- Lack of appetite.
- Difficulty eating or swallowing.
- Bleeding from a body opening such as the mouth, nose or rectum.
- Offensive odor, particularly from the mouth.
- Difficulty breathing or going to the bathroom, such as straining to urinate or to have a bowel movement.
- Lethargy or loss of stamina.

Treatment options for dogs and cats are similar to what humans receive. Higginbotham says veterinarians will consider surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy or immunotherapy, but that these therapies usually have fewer [side effects](#) in the animals than in humans.

"The majority of our drugs used for chemotherapy are the same drugs used in people, but we are very careful about the dose," Higginbotham said. "We use the amount of dose needed to maximize the response, yet limit the dose so we can diminish the potential for side effects as much as possible. Overall, less than 20 percent of our patients actually need supportive therapy because of a side effect from the treatment. The majority of animals we treat with chemotherapy or [radiation therapy](#) have very minimal side effects and those are usually short term."

If you notice a change in your pet's behavior, contact a veterinarian.

Provided by Kansas State University

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