

What dog owners can learn from a mysterious canine infection

October 23 2015, by Rob Payne, Sciencenetwork Wa



WA Police dog Rumble. Credit: WA Police

While he's usually fighting Perth's crooks and thieves, over the past week WA police dog Rumble has been battling a mysterious infection resulting in seizures.

Following tests for stroke, infectious diseases and cancer, as well as an MRI to check for structural damage to the brain or spinal cord, Murdoch

University Veterinary Hospital has now diagnosed the much-loved eight-year-old German Shepherd with meningoencephalitis.

A combination of meningitis and encephalitis, the condition involves inflammation of the meninges—the membrane surrounding the brain and spinal cord—and inflammation of the brain itself.

While incidences of meningitis, encephalitis, and encephalomyelitis are generally low in dogs, owners should be watchful for warning signs such as fever, neck rigidity and spasms.

Pets suffering from meningoencephalitis may also exhibit depression, blindness, seizures, agitation, lethargy and weakness/paralysis.

Murdoch Senior Lecturer in veterinary emergency and critical care Dr Claire Sharp says Rumble is responding well to treatment.

"While Rumble's condition is improving he still has a long way to go and is not out of danger yet," she says

"Recovery may take weeks to months and he may never return to full fitness."

The cause of Rumble's illness is currently unknown, which is not surprising, as the condition's origins are often difficult for vets to detect.



Rumble in hospital. Credit: WA Police

Meningitis in dogs can be caused by tick-borne diseases such as Lyme

disease or parasitic infections such as toxoplasmosis.

In 2014, Murdoch Professor Peter Irwin highlighted the increasing dangers of vector-borne diseases globally for canines.

The Merck Veterinary Manual suggests brain and spinal cord infections are on the rise with the worldwide expansion of Flaviviruses, a genus which includes the West Nile, dengue and tick-borne encephalitis viruses.

To help unravel the mystery, Murdoch has sent samples of Rumble's spinal fluid to the United States for additional testing for [infectious diseases](#) which can affect the nervous system.



Rumble and his handler Senior Constable Mathew Muletta. Credit: WA Police.

That Rumble is responding well to treatment isn't a surprise, given that this isn't his first serious health issue.

In 2011 he was mauled by two pitbulls, who did serious damage to his neck and legs—an attack that required four months of convalescence and left his handlers fearing he might be too traumatised to return to active duty.

However, he came back with a vengeance.

His most recent operation was helping to apprehend Bret Capper, known as the 'Porsche Kid', running the fugitive down in bushland.

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