Veterinarian offers insight into canine influenza, suggests pet owners consider risk factors before vaccinating

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Recent reports of an increase in canine influenza virus (CIV) diagnoses have pet owners worried and alarmed. Richard Meadows, Curators Distinguished Teaching Professor of Small Animal Community Practice Medicine at the University of Missouri, says that while pet owners should be cautious, print and broadcast media reports showing increases in canine flu may be exaggerated. He suggests that pet owners should consider the risk factors associated with canine flu and consult with their pets' veterinarians before making a determination about whether to have their pets vaccinated.

CIV causes respiratory infection in dogs; however, unlike human influenza, CIV is not "seasonal" flu and infections can occur year-round. The most common clinical sign is a cough that can persist for 10 to 21 days. Affected dogs may have a soft, moist cough or a dry cough and can often be mistaken as Bordetella (the most common cause of kennel cough). Symptoms also include discharges from the nose and/or eyes, sneezing and decreased appetite. A small percentage of dogs are more severely affected with pneumonia, a high-grade fever (104°F to 106°F) and increased respiratory rate.

"While it is a diagnosis for which responsible pet owners should be aware, recent American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) reports and suggestions indicate that pet owners should consult with their veterinarian to determine whether their dogs' lifestyle includes risks for

exposure to the canine influenza virus," Meadows said.

According to Meadows, the following factors could help determine if a pet is at risk for canine influenza:

- Dogs with chronic respiratory problems
- Brachiocephalic (short nosed) breeds such as bulldogs and pugs
- Dogs that are fairly inactive
- Dogs that are immune-compromised
- Dogs that are frequently in contact with other dogs – for example, at boarding or day care facilities, dog parks or grooming salons

The first recognized outbreak of canine influenza in the world was the H3N8 strain in racing greyhounds at a track in Florida in 2004. A vaccine for this strain became available in 2009. Another strain, H3N2, affecting dogs (and rarely cats) was detected overseas as early as 2006 but an outbreak of this strain did not occur in the U.S. until 2015, with one case identified in Missouri. To date, no evidence of transmission from dogs to people has been detected. The first commercial vaccine for the disease was approved in November 2015.

"The vaccine may prevent dogs from getting the virus altogether, but much like in people, sometimes it only lessens the effects of the disease," Meadows said.

The normal protocol for treatment of the disease is a series of medications including antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and keeping the dog hydrated.

"Because symptoms are similar to a host of other ailments in dogs, such as Bordetella, the best way to diagnose canine flu is through bloodwork," Meadows said. "To put it in perspective, so far, one dog has tested

positive in Missouri, 115 other dogs have tested negative – while not an epidemic or a pandemic by any means, pet owners should still be aware of the risk factors and act appropriately."

More information: For more information, please see the AVMA's Frequently Asked Questions: www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pa … CanineInfluenza.aspx

Provided by University of Missouri