

Rapid spread of dog disease can be stopped with diligent infection control

October 5 2016, by Misti Crane

Dogs aren't exactly famous for their personal hygiene or for maintaining a respectful distance from their canine pals. With a nuzzle, a shared ball or a bark, a dog battling a bug can easily pass it to others and, in some cases, people.

This becomes especially worrisome in group settings, such as dog parks, dog shows and doggie daycare, where animals can spread illness rapidly and then carry it back into their homes and neighborhoods. Protocol for keeping disease transmission at bay has, until now, lagged decades behind efforts to contain human infectious disease.

New guidance for halting the spread of a multitude of dog diseases is now available, thanks to an effort led by veterinary experts at The Ohio State University.

The advice, which appears in a user-friendly guide and in a scientific paper in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, is intended to be a tool for those in charge of canine group settings and for dog owners, said Jason Stull, a veterinarian and assistant professor of veterinary preventive medicine at Ohio State.

"When you have many dogs in a fairly confined space, the opportunities for [disease transmission](#) are everywhere," Stull said.

Stull and his co-authors want their work to lead to written infection prevention and control plans for settings where dogs congregate.

"In veterinary medicine we're probably 30 years behind in our infection control efforts compared to human medicine," he said. "But a lot of the risks really can be managed with some simple steps."

Stull and his collaborators embarked on the effort at the urging of the American Kennel Club. The researchers reviewed more than 400 academic papers related to the topic and examined published reports of outbreaks of disease in dogs before developing their advice.

The guidance they provide is intended to be an outline of the best possible approach to [infection control](#), Stull said.

But what works in one setting won't necessarily be practical or possible in another and those who make use of it are expected to tailor the guidelines to their needs, he said.

Among the recommendations:

- Dogs with signs of infection should be kept out of group settings.
- People who touch dogs in group settings, such as handlers, staff and judges, should frequently wash their hands or use sanitizer.
- Community surfaces and items should be regularly disinfected and sharing of items such as leashes, toys and bowls should be avoided.
- Dogs should have up-to-date vaccinations, including against distemper, parvovirus, adenovirus, parainfluenza, Bordetella and rabies - all highly contagious diseases that can lead to severe disease and death.
- Efforts should be made to keep rodents and wildlife out of areas where dogs will be, and to keep dogs out of areas most likely to include ticks, fleas and other disease-carrying pests.
- Those in charge of group settings and those who participate should avail themselves of a new online risk calculator to help

them determine the potential for disease spread.

- Dogs should be kept clean - and cleaned up after.
- Organizers of group events should avoid overcrowding of dogs.
- Care should be taken with puppies and other dogs with weaker immune systems. The benefits of socialization should be weighed against the risk of illness.
- Every group setting should have on-site or off-site access to a veterinarian who can help with disease-prevention guidelines.

In practice, following this advice could mean a judge uses hand sanitizer between groups of dogs when pulling up their jowls to look at their teeth.

It could mean a parks and recreation department works to eliminate standing water in a dog park, and to stay on top of keeping the grass mowed short.

It could mean a doggie daycare operator assigns dogs to smaller play groups so that if disease spreads it will be limited.

Stull said vaccines are an excellent guard against disease spread, but many of the threats to dog health aren't vaccine-preventable and require additional thoughtful prevention.

"It's going to be a bit of a culture change and we need everyone involved - from the [dog owners](#) to group organizers to large organizations such as the AKC," he said.

"People who care about dogs are really invested and want to do what they can to protect their loved ones and that's what we're trying to do. On top of that, a lot of these diseases can be transmitted to people."

Patricia Haines, past president of the Ohio Veterinary Medical Association and a consultant to Stull and his collaborators, said the

information they've provided is invaluable and science-based.

"This project will be informative to the experts, those planning competitive events and for people who manage private facilities and public situations, such as dog parks," said Haines, who raises and shows pointers.

"Many of the dog-loving public have never thought of the risks at dog parks and other group settings," she said.

The new infectious disease guidelines do not focus on animal shelters and rescues, which have other factors to consider and for which there are some existing established recommendations, but rather on settings in which the [dogs](#) have owners.

About 35 percent of households in the U.S. and Canada have at least one dog - totaling about 75 million canine companions in North America.

Provided by The Ohio State University

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