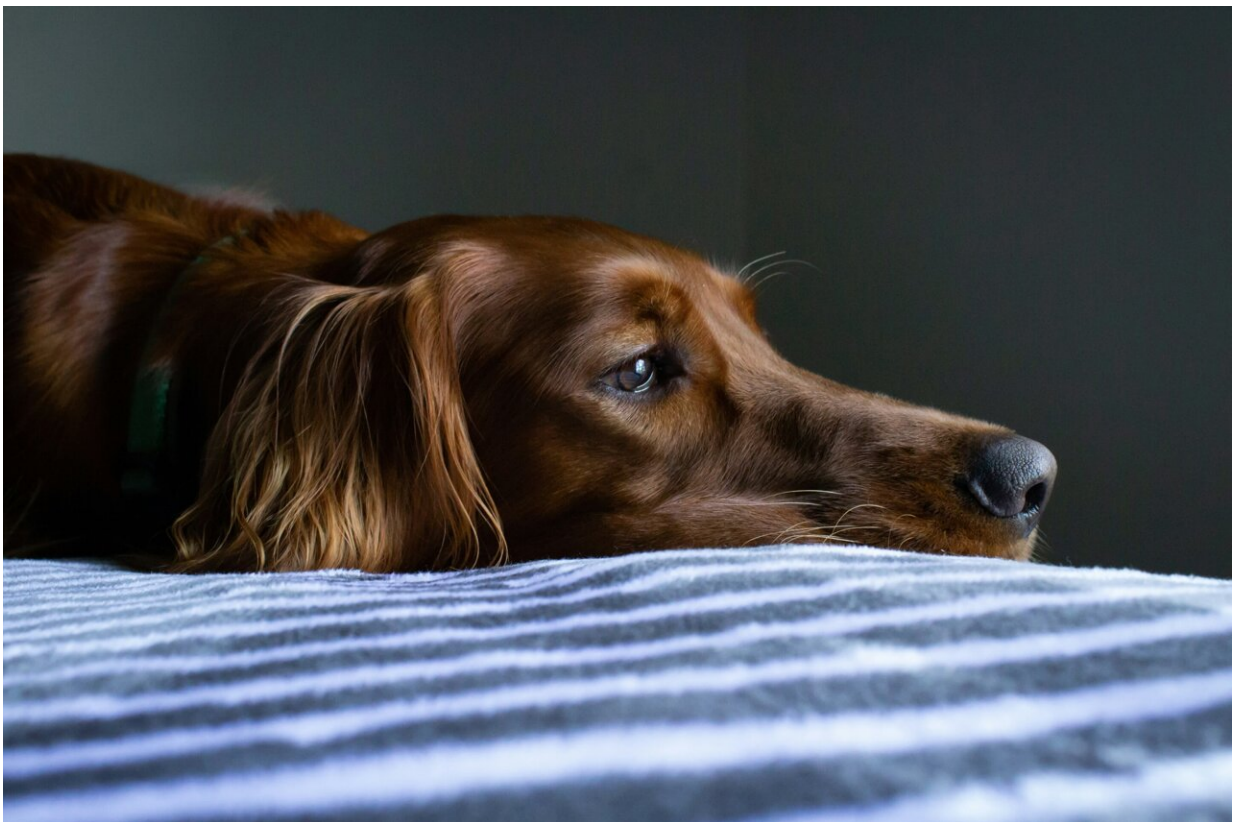


Q&A: A mysterious illness is spreading among dogs nationwide. Here's what you need to know

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If your pup seems unusually pooped—coughing, sneezing or acting sluggish—don't pooh-pooh it. A mysterious canine illness is spreading

throughout the country that can linger for months, cause fever, pneumonia and, in rare cases, death.

Veterinarians have yet to find a cure for the disease they're calling atypical canine respiratory infectious disease (aCRID), and in its most recent update on the disease in December, the American Vet Med Association said there were no firm case numbers as it spreads across the nation. Despite the lack of knowledge about aCRID, a University of Maryland researcher studying the disease says quick action to care for your canine pal can lead to better outcomes.

Assistant Professor of Veterinary Medicine Mostafa Ghanem is working with the Maryland Veterinary Medical Association to analyze samples from sick dogs and help identify the cause of the disease. We asked him what scientists currently know and what [dog owners](#) can do to protect their dogs and themselves.

What are the symptoms, and what should dog owners do if they see these signs in their pets?

Dogs infected with the canine respiratory illness present symptoms such as difficulty breathing, coughing, sneezing, nasal and/or eye discharge, loss of appetite and lethargy. If you notice these signs, immediately contact your veterinarian.

What causes this disease and how does it spread?

We still don't know. It could be a virus, bacteria, fungus or even a combination. Current evidence suggests it's not caused by common canine respiratory pathogens like canine parainfluenza virus or Bordetella, also known as kennel cough. Investigations are ongoing, but there is no definitive cause identified yet.

The spread is also unclear, though it's suspected to be transmitted through respiratory droplets and aerosols from coughing and sneezing by infected dogs or direct contact with contaminated objects. Dog day-care centers, closed spaces and other gatherings of dogs may play a role in the spread of the illness.

How dangerous is it, and does it affect different breeds, sizes or ages of dogs differently?

Many cases present with mild to moderate respiratory symptoms, such as coughing and sneezing that may last six to eight weeks or longer. In some cases the dog may develop chronic pneumonia. In all instances, the disease doesn't respond to antibiotics or responds only minimally.

Fewer cases may show the most severe form of acute pneumonia which can lead to death, often within one to three days.

Currently, there is no conclusive evidence of a relation between disease severity and dog breed, age, sex or size. Still, it is generally advisable for pet owners to be more careful with young puppies, old-aged and immunocompromised dogs.

Are humans in danger from the disease?

Currently, there is no evidence of aCRID transmission to humans. However, because we don't know what the causative agent is, it is generally recommended to thoroughly wash your hands after handling your or other dogs and limit contact with sick dogs.

How is this disease treated?

aCRID doesn't have a specific treatment, as the cause is unknown.

Supportive care, including hydration, oxygen therapy, cough suppressants, and antibiotics (if bacterial infection is suspected) is critical. In severe cases, hospitalization might be necessary.

How long is a dog contagious, and how can people help prevent the spread?

It is unclear how long the dogs remain contagious, but generally, like other diseases, we can expect the transmission risk to decrease when the signs recede.

To prevent the spread of the [disease](#), dog owners are advised to minimize their pets' contact with other dogs, particularly in areas like dog parks and daycares, and to avoid communal water and food bowls.

In the event of illness, it is crucial to isolate the affected pet in a separate room, removing shared bowls, beds, and toys. These precautions play a pivotal role in mitigating the transmission of most diseases and ensuring the well-being of dogs.

Dog owners are also strongly recommended to keep their pet's vaccinations up to date, specifically targeting respiratory diseases such as Bordetella, canine adenovirus type 2, canine influenza, and canine parainfluenza. These vaccinations can help maintain overall health, which significantly bolsters a dog's immune system.

How will the study work, and how can dog owners participate?

We do not work directly with dog owners, but rather with veterinarians who can assess whether a dog and illness fit the study's inclusion criteria, and can collect an appropriate sample. We have reached out to

veterinary hospitals and clinics across Maryland, encouraging them to submit swab samples from dogs displaying aCRID symptoms. We are actively collecting and welcome additional submissions from veterinarians.

Our approach at UMD's Molecular Epidemiology Laboratory uses advanced metagenomic sequencing to comprehensively analyze all microbial entities present in a sample in hopes of identifying the agents responsible for the illness.

Provided by University of Maryland

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