

Strategies for detecting and preventing pet cancer

February 5 2024



Some of the most common cancers diagnosed in dogs include osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer; mammary tumors; skin tumors such as mast cell tumors or soft tissue sarcomas; and lymphoma, a cancer that forms in the lymphatic system. Credit: Texas A&M University School of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, roughly 1 in 5 cats and 1 in 4 dogs will, at some point in their life, develop tumors, with estimations that almost half of dogs over the age of 10 will develop a form of cancer.

Because signs of cancer may be subtle or overlooked and symptoms can vary widely, early detection can be challenging, sometimes leaving pets without a diagnosis or medical care.

In recognition of World Cancer Day on Feb. 4, which gives many the opportunity to raise awareness on [cancer prevention](#), detection, and treatment, Dr. Vanna Dickerson, an assistant professor of soft tissue surgery at the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, offers insight on how owners can be proactive against pet cancer.

Staying informed

One way that owners can help detect and prevent the spread of cancer is by becoming familiar with common pet cancers and associated symptoms, making potential warning signs more easily recognizable.

"Some of the most common cancers diagnosed in dogs include osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer; mammary tumors; skin tumors such as mast cell tumors or soft tissue sarcomas; and lymphoma, a cancer that forms in the lymphatic system," Dickerson said. "In cats, common cancers include [mammary tumors](#), lymphoma, and squamous cell carcinoma, a type of skin cancer."

Dickerson encourages owners to focus on learning the symptoms associated with different forms of cancer, since [risk factors](#) are less

reliable as an early detection method.

"Even though there are some cancers in which certain breeds develop more frequently, for the majority of cancers we see in veterinary medicine, specific risk factors have not been definitively proven," Dickerson explained. "However, pet owners can research their pet's breed to better understand what signs they need to watch more closely for in their pet, as associated symptoms can range from a lump that can be felt on or under the skin to limping or trouble breathing."

Close relationships with veterinarians

Building a strong relationship with a veterinarian is important to a pet's overall health and becomes even more important to cancer prevention. In fact, regular veterinary check-ups can help veterinarians catch cancer in its early stages.

"Routine visits allow many diseases to be caught earlier in the process, potentially making treatment easier and more effective," Dickerson said. "For example, masses that are caught while they are very small can often be treated with a much smaller surgery than masses that are not found until they are very large. In other cases of cancer, routine veterinary visits mean the disease is caught before it spreads to other areas of the body."

Regular check-ups also allow veterinarians to recognize signs that may otherwise go unnoticed by pet owners, ensuring a more accurate diagnosis and treatment plan.

"A [physical examination](#) is one of the most important aspects of cancer diagnosis because veterinarians will be able to recognize lumps in or under the skin, enlarged lymph nodes, abnormal lung sounds, or abnormally enlarged organs within the belly," Dickerson said.

"Imaging with X-rays, ultrasound, or computed tomography (CT scan) can determine whether the cancer is affecting multiple organs within the body or if there are abnormalities that might change a pet's treatment plan, such as underlying kidney or liver disease."

Treatments can involve surgery, chemotherapy, [radiation therapy](#), or a combination of therapies, but Dickerson pointed out that the treatment used depends on a pet's overall health status, cancer type, affected areas, and the owner's preferences.

"In [veterinary medicine](#), we strive for a balance between treating the cancer to the best of our ability and maintaining a good quality of life for our furry companions," Dickerson said. "I encourage owners to discuss all options with the oncology team in detail before deciding on the best plan for their pet. We always want you to make the best decision for both your pet and your family and to support you in any way that we can."

By staying informed on pet cancers and developing a strong relationship with their veterinarian, owners can take meaningful steps in early cancer detection, ensuring that their beloved companions receive the best care to stay happy and healthy.

Provided by Texas A&M University

Citation: Strategies for detecting and preventing pet cancer (2024, February 5) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-02-strategies-pet-cancer.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.