



Fast Facts about Canine Influenza

It seemed to appear without warning. Suddenly, in late September, newspapers, television news programs and Internet websites were filled with stories about canine influenza, a new flu-like disease rumored to be sweeping the country.

But, how *new* is canine influenza, really? How did it develop? How is it spread? How do veterinarians treat it? And, are there a few, common sense precautions that may lessen your pet's risk?

To answer your questions, the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) has compiled the most current information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and researchers in the field. This is an emerging issue in which new developments occur very quickly, so be sure to check the AAHA website, www.Healthypet.com, for updates.

How did canine influenza develop?

Canine influenza appears to be related to an influenza strain that affects horses. At some point, the virus mutated and the new strain made the leap from horses to dogs.

Was the first outbreak in September?

No, canine influenza was diagnosed initially in 2004. Until this year, outbreaks seemed to be contained to greyhound racetracks and seemed to affect only racing dogs. According to a September 26, 2005, CDC media briefing, the first evidence of canine influenza in companion dogs was documented in spring 2005 when shelters, boarding facilities, humane societies and veterinarians submitted samples from dogs suspected of carrying the disease.

Is my dog at risk?

Yes. All dogs are at risk. Canine influenza is a new disease for which there is currently no vaccine. All dogs are susceptible to infection, and no dogs are immune.

Is canine influenza fatal?

Usually not. Most dogs diagnosed with canine influenza experience a mild form of the disease. They usually suffer from a persistent cough that may last for as long as three weeks and may experience a yellowish nasal discharge that can be treated effectively with antibiotics.

Dogs that experience a stronger version of canine influenza frequently have a high fever and exhibit increased respiratory rates and other indications of pneumonia. Currently, antibiotics treat this form of the disease successfully in about 95 percent of the cases.

How is canine influenza spread?

At present, canine influenza appears to be an airborne disease, much like kennel cough (*Bordetella bronchiseptica*). Physical contact between dogs does not seem to be required.

Can I catch canine influenza from my dog?

To date, there are no documented cases of humans contracting canine influenza from dogs.

How do I protect my dog?

Until a vaccine is developed, there is no way to ensure your dog won't contract canine influenza. A good rule of thumb, however, is to assume that the greater the exposure your dog has to other dogs, the greater the chance of infection. If your dog socializes frequently with other dogs or is boarded at a kennel, the odds of exposure are greater than if your dog remains at home.

Does this mean I shouldn't take my dog to the groomer, doggie day care, the dog park, or a boarding facility?

That is a decision you need to make individually, balancing your needs and those of your animal with the potential risk.

During the CDC media briefing, pet owners were advised to take "reasonable precautions." For instance, if your pet exhibits signs of a respiratory illness, be sure to contact your veterinarian.

Also, use groomers, day care sites and boarders with which you are familiar and at which you feel comfortable. You are entitled to ask about steps operators take to isolate any dogs that appear to be ill.

Finally, you should remain advised of media notices about outbreaks in your area. It's possible that canine influenza may never appear in your community.

What are the symptoms of canine influenza?

The symptoms are very similar to kennel cough. The first indication is a cough that may last for as long as three weeks in spite of treatment with antibiotics. According to an advisory issued by the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, "Most dogs have a soft, moist cough, while others have a dry cough similar to that induced by *Bordetella bronchiseptica*/parainfluenza virus infection. Many dogs have purulent nasal discharge and a low-grade fever. The nasal discharge likely represents a secondary bacterial infection that quickly resolves with treatment with a broad-spectrum, bactericidal antibiotic."

What should I do if I suspect my dog has canine influenza?

Contact your veterinarian immediately. Be sure to tell your veterinarian if your dog has been boarded, sent to the groomer or involved in any social activities (dog park, doggie day care, etc.) within the last month.

Remember, coughing may be an indication of any of a variety of diseases. Your veterinarian is best qualified to make the diagnosis.

Can my dog contract canine influenza at the veterinarian's office?

Any time your dog comes in contact with other dogs or uses a facility where other dogs are present, there is risk. AAHA-accredited veterinary practices are equipped with isolation rooms and meet stringent standards for cleanliness — both of which make it less likely that your dog will be exposed.

To find an AAHA-accredited practice in your area, visit www.Healthypet.com. Feel free to ask your veterinarian if the practice is AAHA-accredited and what steps they are taking to prevent the spread of canine influenza.

Is it safe to adopt a dog from a shelter?

Adopting a dog from a shelter is a wonderful way to acquire a pet. Given that canine influenza is a new disease, however, be sure to take reasonable precautions, particularly if you have another dog at home.

Those precautions may include: 1) Obtain your new pet from a shelter with which you are familiar and in which you have confidence. 2) Inquire about the shelter's quarantine procedures. Ask if incoming animals are kept in a separate area during the quarantine period, and ask if the shelter avoids any cross-traffic between new animals and the general population until the quarantine period has elapsed. 3) Inspect the general population area for yourself when you walk through. 4) Ask if the shelter has experienced any cases of canine influenza – and ask how those cases were treated. 5) Finally, ask if the shelter has acquired any animals from states or shelters that experienced an outbreak.

What is the incubation period for canine influenza?

The incubation is approximately 2-5 days.

What should I do if I have more than one dog and one of them contracts canine influenza?

Contact your veterinarian immediately. He or she can treat the pet that is ill and give you advice on caring for the pet that is symptom-free.