

February 1, 2023

You may have seen recent news articles about the uniqueness of the canine respiratory illnesses impacting the DC Metro area in the last few months. We experienced firsthand how this year's illness has impacted dogs, even vaccinated ones, much differently than in any of the previous 20 years our daycare has been in operation. We wanted to share with all our Fur-Get Me Not customers some information that we have gathered from local veterinarians which we previously shared with many of our daycare customers.

Local veterinarians have seen an increase in respiratory illnesses in dogs since October 2022 and a spike around the holidays. Respiratory illnesses in dogs are contagious in a similar manner as they are in people (i.e. through touch, fluids, airborne particles, etc.) so a dog can become infected without necessarily spending a lot of time around other dogs. When an infected dog coughs, sneezes, or barks, they shed this virus. This means any dog can become infected, even if it's a walk around the block, greeting a neighborhood dog, visiting dog parks, or by simply sniffing where another infected dog has recently coughed. With a rise in dog population in the DMV area, this means there are even more interactions or places where dogs may have come in contact with it.

The usual primary respiratory illness cause (Tracheobronchitis) has long been referred to as "Kennel Cough" but this term has become a misnomer and outdated. In the past few years the pet industry has been moving away from this term and instead referring to these illnesses using a more relevant and descriptive term known as "Canine Cough".

Dogs are often vaccinated to protect against Tracheobronchitis with the Bordatella vaccine but one factor that made this year's respiratory illnesses unique from the past has been the variety of illnesses. Veterinarians have seen Bordatella related infections, influenza, mycoplasmosis, among others. Plus some infections did not test positive for anything specific.

The Bordatella vaccine is similar to the human flu vaccine in that sometimes the strain in the community is different from what the vaccine protects against. It seems that may also be a contributing factor this year. There is an influenza vaccine but many dogs haven't received it, as it is traditionally an optional vaccine.

When a dog shows symptoms of a respiratory illness, the current medical approach is to focus on the symptoms to make the dog more comfortable while they fight the illness versus additional tests to try to determine the exact illness. Many of the symptoms are treated similarly regardless of the specific cause. Each veterinarian has their own opinion on when it's best to prescribe medications based on the severity of the symptoms they find and the dog's general health situation. The feedback we've received (while still rare) is

that there have been more instances than usual of a respiratory infection being resistant to the normal medications or progressing into something more serious such as pneumonia.

Symptoms are usually similar to the common cold in humans. They include a dry hacking (like something is caught in your dog's throat), coughing, sneezing, wheezing, and/or gagging. If you notice these symptoms in your dog, it's best to keep your dog away from other dogs even while walking in your neighborhood, to help prevent the spread. Many cases remain mild, though we feel it's always best to consult with your veterinarian especially when something is going around the community. We always recommend any dogs attending our daycare to consult with their veterinarian before returning. Your dog's situation is unique to your dog. Seniors and puppies often have lower immune systems but other factors and genetics could also make your dog more susceptible than others. If your dog is not eating well or becomes lethargic, then it is always advised to speak with your dog's veterinarian as those are potential signs that the illness may be progressing..

Thankfully, the veterinarians we have spoken to have not seen a high rate of re-infections, but this doesn't mean they won't occur in the future. Traditionally a dog's immune system is much more resistant after they recover. But every dog's immune system is different and similar to people, their immune system can also be impacted by environmental conditions (e.g. stress, routine changes, etc.).

We currently require the Bordatella vaccine for our daycare, but do not require the influenza vaccine. Historically, veterinarians have not often recommended the influenza vaccine but they are re-evaluating based on recent events. After speaking with several local veterinarians we do recommend customers who with very social dogs, to talk to their veterinarian about the vaccine (specifically the bivalent version which protects against two flu strains) to see if it makes sense for your dog's situation. It's impossible to know how much of the flu is being spread versus other illnesses or whether it will linger in our area. But, it may be worth considering if you want the peace of mind of additional protection when your dog is socializing around town or interacting with other dogs.

Our dog walkers and pet sitters will let you know if they notice anything out of the ordinary with your dog while in their care. At our daycare, we will do the same, and similar to schools, camps, etc., we have a different set of protocols and communications we follow whenever we see a pattern of illness.

We hope this has been helpful information. Should you have any additional questions, [feel free to contact our team](#).