Dog Owners Urged to Learn About Distemper Amid Outbreak

Amid a growing canine distemper outbreak in Texas, the Texas Veterinary Medical Association urges pet owners to learn about this highly contagious and deadly disease.

Austin, Texas (PRWEB) December 15, 2014 -- The canine distemper outbreak that is centered in Amarillo, Texas, has only escalated since it began this summer. Canine distemper is a highly contagious disease that is caused by a virus that is related to the measles virus that affects humans. Because the distemper virus has a high rate of mortality and there is no cure, Texas dog owners are urged to learn about how to prevent and recognize the signs of the disease.

Puppies and unvaccinated dogs of any age are the most susceptible to distemper. The virus is usually spread by respiratory secretions, such as those expelled when an infected dog coughs or sneezes. Due to its highly contagious nature, outbreaks of distemper tend to occur in places where dogs congregate, like shelters and kennels that do not require immunizations.

Signs of a dog infected by distemper include watery or greenish mucus-like discharge from the eyes, sneezing and discharge from the nose, coughing, fever, sluggishness, decreased appetite, vomiting and/or diarrhea. As the virus progresses, neurological effects can be seen, such as twitching, convulsions or behavior mimicking “chewing gum” or “fly-biting.” Unfortunately, once the neurological effects are visible, the prognosis for survival becomes poor. There is no cure for the virus, so treatment consists of administering supportive care such as IV fluids, antibiotics for secondary infections and nutritional support while allowing the dog’s immune system to attempt to fight off the infection.

“Distemper is one of the saddest diseases for me to diagnose,” said former TVMA president Lori Teller, DVM, DABVP, who practices at Meyerland Animal Clinic in Houston, Texas. “What makes distemper even more heartbreaking is that the vaccine is extremely effective and does a wonderful job of protecting dogs from this fatal disease.” Partner with your veterinarian to ensure that your dog is receiving all of the proper vaccinations, including their pediatric series as well as all distemper booster immunizations.

Please keep in mind that the distemper virus is incredibly hardy and may linger on items that have come in contact with it, even after an infected dog is no longer in the home. Discuss with your veterinarian the precautions to take before allowing another dog to enter your home. For more information on canine distemper and other pet health topics, visit http://www.texvetpets.org/article/canine-distemper/.

About The Texas Veterinary Medical Association
Founded in 1903, the Texas Veterinary Medical Association is a professional association composed of more than 3,700 veterinarians committed to protecting public health, promoting high educational, ethical and moral standards within the veterinary profession and educating the public about animal health and its relationship to human health. For more information, call 512/452-4224 or visit www.tvma.org.
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