

Prince Frederick Animal Hospital
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Canine Influenza FAQ

Canine Influenza is a highly contagious upper respiratory tract virus of dogs. The virus, also known as H3N8, emerged in 2003, apparently jumping species from racehorses to greyhounds at a racetrack in Florida. There has been no report of spread from dogs to humans. Since it is a newly emerged virus, all dogs are susceptible. The virus has been confirmed in 30 states, including a recent outbreak in Northern Virginia.

Clinical symptoms of Canine Influenza are similar to kennel cough. These symptoms include sneezing, coughing, runny nose/eyes and fever. The incubation period is 2-5 days, though dogs can initially show no symptoms and still be contagious. The virus is spread through direct contact with respiratory secretions, either from contagious dogs, contaminated objects or people moving between contagious dogs. The duration of illness can run 1-4 weeks. 80% of dogs have a very mild form, but up to 8% of dogs can develop life-threatening pneumonia.

Testing for Canine Influenza is not recommended, since testing involves an initial blood test that must be repeated in 3 weeks for confirmation. There is no treatment for the flu virus, although some dogs need supportive care for dehydration or secondary bacterial pneumonia.

Dogs at risk are those around other dogs. Dogs that go to kennels, grooming parlors, doggie daycare, pet stores, dog parks, veterinary hospitals and obedience classes are considered at risk.

Although the American Veterinary Medical Association is not recommending vaccinating all dogs, those at risk may receive a vaccine. The US Department of Agriculture licensed a killed vaccine (meaning the vaccine cannot cause disease) in 2009 for dogs over 8 weeks old. The vaccine is administered subcutaneously and boosted in 2-4 weeks. Dogs should have no history of prior vaccine reactions. The vaccine has been shown to lower the duration of disease, reduce the symptoms and reduce the contagious spread of the flu.

Prince Frederick Animal Hospital is offering the Canine Influenza vaccine to our at-risk dog patients. Please speak with a receptionist to schedule an appointment. We will update a list of boarding kennels and groomers that require this vaccine for services.