

May 30, 2018

By: Gabrielle Fadl, DVM

Many of our clients have reached out to us in regards to the dangerous, potentially deadly canine influenza outbreak that has occurred in Brooklyn. Recently, this flu virus has been identified in a small number of dogs in Manhattan. We would like to take this opportunity to answer some frequently asked questions to both ease some of your concerns and help determine if your dog is at risk for this illness.

What is canine influenza?

Canine influenza, or the dog flu, is a virus that is easily transmitted from one dog through airborne or nose-to-nose contact with one another. There are two different types of the flu virus, H3N2 and H3N8, which have been confirmed. Canine influenza is only passed from dog-to-dog, and is not contagious to people. Dogs at risk are those who frequent boarding or doggie daycare facilities in Manhattan, or who visit any parks or boarding facilities in Brooklyn. Clinical signs typically include respiratory signs such as coughing, sneezing with colored nasal discharge (yellow, green, or white), fever, and decrease in appetite or energy level. If allowed to progress, untreated cases of influenza can progress to pneumonia and even death in a small percentage of dogs. Fortunately, the majority of dogs infected with influenza show the mild form of the virus, but because of the potential severity of this illness, it is important to identify the clinical signs and seek veterinary care if noted.

Is there a flu vaccine available for my dog?

Yes! A bivalent (protecting against both influenza viruses, H3N2 and H3N8) is available through our office. If your dog has never received the influenza vaccine before, s/he will need to receive two boosters, separated by 2-4 weeks, before being considered fully protected.

Will the vaccine prevent infection in my dog?

Although the vaccine can reduce the risk of your dog contracting influenza, there is no guarantee that it will completely prevent illness. However, if your vaccinated dog comes in contact with an infected dog, there is typically a significant reduction of severity and duration of illness. Vaccination also prevents your dog from shedding of the virus, which protects other dogs, further decreasing overall spread of the virus.

Are there any downsides of vaccinating my dog?

The flu vaccine is very much a "lifestyle" vaccination. If your dog does not spend time around other dogs, vaccination may not be necessary. Like any vaccine, there can be short-term side effects, such as lethargy, soreness at the site of injection, or a decrease in appetite. These signs typically last between 24-48 hours following vaccination and are considered acceptable. More serious side effects are very rare, and can include vomiting, diarrhea, facial swelling, hives, heavy breathing, or collapse. These typically occur within several hours of vaccination and typically require medical attention.

My dog has a chronic illness – should he get vaccinated?

If your dog has a history of chronic illness, but still comes in contact with other dogs on a regular basis, please contact us so we can help you determine if your dog should be vaccinated against influenza.

How can I schedule an appointment for my dog to get vaccinated?

If your dog is healthy and has been seen by our office in the last 6 months by one of our veterinarians, please call our office to schedule an appointment to start the vaccine series. This can be done with a technician and does not require a visit with a doctor. If a veterinarian has not performed a full exam on your dog in the last 6 months, but you would like to start this vaccine series, the initial vaccine will need to be done with a doctor. The booster can be done with a technician 2-4 weeks later.

What do I do if I am concerned that my dog is already sick with the flu?

If you believe your dog is showing clinical signs of influenza, please contact our office to schedule an appointment as soon as possible. If you are calling after hours, please contact one of the emergency facilities in the city, or bring your pet there if you feel they are having any difficulty breathing.

The Animal Medical Center, 510 E 62nd St, 212-838-8100

BluePearl Veterinary Partners – Midtown, 410 W 55th St, 212-767-0099

BluePearl Veterinary Partners – Downtown, 1W 15th St, 212-924-3311

Below is a recent article regarding the dog influenza outbreak:

<https://nypost.com/2018/05/26/dangerous-strain-of-dog-flu-spreads-to-manhattan/>

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us by phone or e-mail.