

## Good News About a Canine Virus

I doubt that there is a reader who has not been affected by the recent outbreak of an upper respiratory viral infection or the terrible intestinal virus strain that is debilitating many friends and families in Manchester.

In our canine companions there is a disease, which has similar symptoms. The virus, which is spread through the air and by direct or indirect (i.e. utensils, bedding) contact with an infected animal, initially attacks a dog's tonsils and lymph nodes and replicates itself there for about one week. It then attacks the respiratory, urogenital, gastrointestinal, and nervous systems.

In the initial stages of Canine Distemper, the major symptoms include high fever (102 degrees Fahrenheit or 39 degrees Celsius), reddened eyes, and a watery discharge from the nose and eyes. An infected dog will become lethargic and tired, and will usually lose its appetite. Persistent coughing vomiting and diarrhea may also occur. However, in dogs in the later stages of the disease, the virus starts attacking the other systems of the dog's body, particularly the nervous system. The brain and spinal cord are affected and the dog may start having fits, seizures, paralysis, and attacks of hysteria.

Canine distemper is sometimes also called "hard pad disease" because certain strains of the virus can cause an abnormal enlargement or thickening of the pads of an animal's feet. In dogs or animals with weak immune systems, death may result two to five weeks after the initial infection.

There have been rumors circulating on the internet about an outbreak of this viral disease. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), in response to the reports has provided a welcome response entitled, "False rumors of new strains of Canine Distemper Virus" and goes on to say:

It was recently brought to our attention that there are rumors circulating online about the existence of two new strains of canine distemper virus. These rumors are untrue. After consulting with two experts, Dr. Ed Dubovi (from Cornell) and Dr. Ron Schultz (from the University of Wisconsin), we provide the following information:

There is no data to back up claims that the disease is on the rise on a national level, but there have been many outbreaks of distemper covered in the news media.

- There have been previously undetected strains here, but it's almost impossible to determine if these strains are newly arrived or just newly detected because of improvements in testing. In addition, minor genetic changes often do not affect the antigenicity of the virus and have no impact on the efficacy of currently available vaccines.
- The currently available distemper vaccines are highly effective and will protect dogs against all currently circulating strains of canine distemper virus.
- The real issue is that there are unvaccinated (or inadequately vaccinated) and unprotected pets at high risk of developing a very deadly, yet preventable, disease.

- Dog owners are strongly urged to consult with their veterinarians regarding vaccination of their dog against distemper and other common diseases, including adenovirus, parvovirus and rabies.