

Canine Cancer

Recently, the Cricket presented an article about a possible link between environmental hazards and cancer rates in Manchester residents.. Unfortunately, these same hazards exist for our domesticated pets. This week's column is dedicated to discussing which breeds are more susceptible because of genetics and what steps can be taken to reduce the risks.

A recent study by the Environmental Working Group (EWG) found many toxic chemicals in 20 dogs and 37 cats. At this time, we cannot conclusively prove that they directly lead to an increase in cancer in our pets, however, they do increase our level of suspicion on a potentially serious threat to our children and ourselves, and research like this should be encouraged by government and private funding.

Cancer is the number-one cause of death in dogs over the age of 2. One in four die of the disease and many others experience the devastating effects. While all dogs face the risk, we know that certain breeds are more susceptible. As an example, 60 percent of golden retrievers die of cancer. Other breeds that exhibit a higher risk are: Labrador Retrievers, Pugs, Bernese Mountain Dogs, Cocker Spaniels, Boxers, Collies, Scottish Terriers and Rottweilers.

In our practice, surgery to remove tumors in dogs is common. Many of them merely cause discomfort because of their location and the results of histopathological tests prove them to be benign. In those cases, surgery is curative..In other cases, surgery, radiation therapy and chemotherapy are required. When in doubt, a non-invasive needle biopsy often

proves diagnostic. Sometimes a surgical biopsy is required to define them.

There are many warning signs of cancer in pets. Many of these symptoms may be due to other health related issues, however, if you see any of them, consult with your veterinarian.

- *Abdominal swelling*
- *Unusual lumps or bumps*
- *Persistent coughing*
- *Odors from the mouth or breath*
- *Bloody discharges in urine or feces*
- *Sudden collapse*
- *Prolonged limping*
- *Lesions that are slow to heal*
- *Loss of appetite and or energy*

Cancers cannot always be detected by a single test. Sometimes blood testing provides a clue, in other cases x-rays and or ultrasound exams may be able to rule out cancer as a disease process. If you are able to detect any of the above symptoms, early detection can be life saving. In many cases, surgery may be curative, in other cases, a veterinary oncologist may use radiation or chemo-therapy.

It may be impossible to prevent exposure to all environmental toxins, yet some prudent steps can be taken. They include making sure all lawn chemicals are safe, using foods that contain as few preservatives as possible, provide safe water sources for swimming and drinking, prevent exposure to indoor pollutants such as cigarette smoke and use natural cleaning products.

Finally, we know that obesity increases the risk of cancer, so manage your pets weight carefully. Vitamins such as anti-oxidants are considered beneficial and routine exercise and low stress environments can all have a role to play in reducing the risks of cancer.

If you are interested in contr