

Veterinary Advisory

**Animal Health and Welfare Branch/Office of the Chief Veterinarian for Ontario
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs**

March 2 2018

Confirmed Clusters of Canine Influenza in Southern Ontario

Since January 2018, three clusters of dogs infected with H3N2 canine influenza virus (CIV) have been identified in Essex County (2) and in the Simcoe-Muskoka area. These are the first known incursions of H3N2 canine influenza in Canada. The virus is widespread in some parts of Asia and is causing outbreaks in the United States, especially in animal shelters.

Canine influenza virus is of concern because it is highly transmissible between dogs, particularly in areas, such as Canada, where dogs do not have natural immunity from previous infection and where canine influenza vaccination is rare.

Canine influenza virus causes disease that is indistinguishable from other causes of canine infectious respiratory disease complex, commonly referred to as “kennel cough”. Most dogs recover within 2 to 3 weeks with no treatment or with basic supportive care such as anti-inflammatories and cough suppressants. Canine influenza virus is more likely to cause severe disease or death in very young and old dogs, as well as brachycephalic breeds and dogs with underlying respiratory or cardiac disease.

Infected dogs can start shedding the virus shortly before onset of clinical signs (within 24 hours). Dogs that have contact with other dogs at events or facilities such as kennels, off-leash parks, classes or competitions are more likely to be exposed. Based on shedding patterns identified during investigation of the first Ontario cluster, it is recommended that dogs with suspected or confirmed canine influenza be kept away from other dogs for four weeks. H3N2 CIV can infect cats, but the incidence appears to be low. Ferrets are susceptible to a range of influenza viruses and are also susceptible to H3N2 CIV.

Control of CIV in veterinary clinics is dependent on prompt recognition of the potential for CIV and use of appropriate infection control practices. The virus is readily inactivated by commonly available disinfectants, when used as part of an appropriate cleaning and disinfection protocol.

Vaccines for CIV (H3N8 and H3N2) are available in Canada and can help reduce the likelihood and severity of disease. Vaccination is recommended for dogs at high-risk of exposure in areas with confirmed cases of CIV. Given the ongoing risk of further introductions of CIV from imported dogs or those travelling from areas where the virus is actively circulating, vaccination should be a consideration for dogs at high-risk.

The two clusters of CIV in Essex County were managed using voluntary confinement of affected and in-contact dogs, and there is currently no known ongoing transmission in the area. The cluster in Simcoe-Muskoka was identified on February 27, 2018 and involves a larger number of dogs. The investigation is ongoing.

Canine H3N2 influenza virus is different from the human H3N2 influenza virus that is a common seasonal flu virus in people. There is no known human risk from H3N2 canine influenza virus; however, the risk of reassortment between the canine H3N2 virus and human seasonal influenza viruses is a potential concern.

Individuals with concerns about their own health after close contact with an infected dog should contact the local public health unit or their physician.

Detection of influenza A in animals is an immediately notifiable hazard and is reported by animal health laboratories to OMAFRA under the *Animal Health Act*. As of January 1, 2018 novel influenza strains (those not known to already be circulating in Ontario) in any domestic animal must also be reported to the local public health unit, including H3N2 CIV. Veterinarians are reminded that if specimens are submitted for testing to any laboratory outside of Ontario, the submitting veterinarian is solely responsible for relaying any notifiable or reportable results to the appropriate agency.

RESOURCES

<https://www.wormsandgermsblog.com/files/2018/01/H3N2-CIV-Infosheet-V1.pdf>

<http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/influenza.pdf>

<https://vet.osu.edu/sites/vet.osu.edu/files/documents/preventive-medicine/Canine%20influenza%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

<https://vet.osu.edu/preventive-medicine/vpm-research/disease-prevention-canine-group-settings>

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