



Canine Influenza (H3N8 variant)

Canine Influenza (CI), a virus in the Influenza A family, is closely related to the Equine Influenza virus and was first seen in dogs in 2004. It has been reported in many states, but is seen most often in dogs housed in shelters rather than in private homes.

Because the disease is new, most dogs do not have existing immunity to the virus and are susceptible to infection. Although 50-80% of infected dogs will show signs of illness, the majority have a mild form of the disease. Up to half of dogs infected with the CI virus do not show signs of illness.

The mild form of the disease is characterized by a soft, moist cough that typically lasts about 10 days. Some dogs have a dry, hacking cough similar to “kennel cough,” and some dogs may have a yellow or green nasal discharge. Signs are typically mild and resolve without treatment; treatment does not visibly alter the course or duration of disease.

A small number of dogs will develop a more severe form, thought to be due to development of a secondary pneumonia. Dogs with severe disease have a high fever (and will be lethargic and not eating), difficulty breathing and may be coughing up blood. These dogs need to be seen and treated immediately.

There is a vaccine for Canine Influenza that has recently been released. It is a killed virus vaccine, and therefore needs two doses 3 to 4 weeks apart to be effective. It does NOT eliminate infection with CI virus; dogs that have been vaccinated properly can still show signs of illness and can still shed virus and infect other dogs. In a study conducted by the vaccine manufacturer, the vaccine reduced the severity of signs and the duration of viral shedding, which are typically mild and short in most unvaccinated dogs.

Given the typical mild course of disease and the inability of the vaccine to prevent illness, we are not recommending vaccination against CI virus to our patients at this time.