Canine Influenza Update

Merck Animal Health Supports Diagnostics for Canine Influenza Outbreak, H3N2 Identified

More than 130 cases confirmed positive for Canine Influenza

Less than a month ago, veterinarians in the Chicago area noticed a sharp increase in the number of dogs coming into their clinics with respiratory illness. The disease was first thought to be Canine Influenza Virus, H3N8, which is a respiratory pathogen of dogs that was first isolated in Florida in 2004. Subsequent testing, however, carried out with the assistance of the New York State Animal Diagnostic Laboratory at Cornell and the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, identified the outbreak as being caused by a virus closely related to Asian strains of influenza A H3N2 viruses, currently in wide circulation in Chinese and South Korean dog populations since at least 2006. The diagnosis was accelerated by Merck Animal Health’s collection of samples from sick dogs from veterinarians in the Chicago area, as well as resources the company committed to the effort. During a three-week period, more than 130 dogs tested positive for Canine Influenza Virus.

“It will take some time before we have a better understanding of this strain of influenza but it’s important for veterinarians and pet owners in impacted areas to continue to take precautionary measures to minimize the risk of exposure to the disease,” said Jill Lopez, D.V.M., Merck Animal Health. “The virus spreads rapidly, especially at boarding facilities, groomers, doggy day cares, dog parks and other spots where dogs co-mingle. Dog owners whose dogs are coughing or showing other signs of respiratory disease should not participate in activities or bring their dogs to facilities where other dogs can be exposed to the virus.”

Both influenza strains can cause high fever, loss of appetite, coughing, nasal discharge and lethargy. Symptoms may be more severe in cases caused by the H3N2 virus.

“This is the first time this strain of Canine Influenza Virus has been found in North America, so there’s a lot we don’t yet know about it,” said Edward Dubovi, Ph.D., Professor of Virology and Director, Virology Laboratory, Animal Health Diagnostic Center, College of Veterinary Medicine, Cornell University. “Veterinary professionals are advised that diagnostic testing of samples from sick pets can be done using a broadly targeted Influenza A matrix reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction assay (RT-PCR). The canine-specific Influenza A H3N8 RT-PCR in use in several laboratories will not detect this virus. We are developing a H3N2-specific serologic assay and are continuing to work with Merck Animal Health to test serum samples from sick dogs, both of which will provide us with valuable information about this emerging disease.”

Merck Animal Health offers a canine influenza vaccine, Nobivac Canine Influenza, which has been proven to provide protection against the H3N8 strain of the virus. It is not known if the current vaccine will provide any protection from this new virus but studies are underway to determine if cross protection is possible. It is important to note that of the samples submitted to Cornell to date, all dogs that tested positive for Canine Influenza H3N2 Virus had not been vaccinated against Canine Influenza H3N8.

For more information about canine influenza, please visit doginfluenza.com.

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About Merck Animal Health
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