

## Protecting Fido from the Dog Flu

*By Ralph Morris, MD, MPH*

*February 23, 2018*

### *Dogs Can Get the Flu*

As if this flu season hasn't been enough of a trial for humans, now there is news that some of our four-legged best friends are contracting "canine influenza," aka "dog flu." The [American Veterinary Medical Association \(AVMA\) reports](#) that two strains of canine influenza virus, H3N8 and H3N2, have been identified in the US. The viruses spread rapidly among dogs and also cats, but there is no evidence that either strain can infect humans. And unlike our mostly seasonal human flu, dog flu can occur at any time of the year.

### *Dog Flu Symptoms*

First identified in Florida in 2004, dog flu takes either a mild or severe form. In the mild form, dogs develop a "soft, moist cough that persists from 10 to 30 days," according to the [AVMA FAQ website](#). Dogs may be lethargic, run a fever and have a reduced appetite. Discharge from the eyes and/or nose may occur; a thick nasal discharge could indicate a secondary bacterial infection. In the severe form, dogs develop fevers of 104 to 106 degrees F and show signs of pneumonia, such as increased respiratory rates and labored breathing. The normal body temperature of a dog is between 101 and 102.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

### *Dog Flu Facts*

Nearly all dogs who are exposed to dog flu become infected simply because they have not been previously exposed to what is still an "emerging disease." According to AVMA, nearly 80% of infected dogs will show clinical signs of the disease, though most cases are mild. The fatality rate from dog flu is less than 10%, and most dogs recover in two to three weeks. Owners can keep dogs hydrated and comfortable



*Argos, my Yellow Labrador Retriever*

while their pets are down with the flu. If pneumonia develops, antibiotics from the veterinarian may be in order.

*Dogs are contagious for up to 30 days after they begin showing symptoms*, according to the [American Kennel Club](#). As with their human companions, a dog's susceptibility to infection varies with its age and immune status. Vaccines for H3N8 canine influenza virus are available, but may not be effective against the H3N2 strain. The vaccine is for dogs at high risk for dog flu, such as those in frequent contact with other dogs, but is not approved for use in cats. Veterinarians can run tests to confirm H3N8 and H3N2 influenza virus infection.

### *Preventing the Spread of Dog Flu*

Human flu spreads by contact with respiratory droplets or aerosols from infected individuals, and dog flu spreads the same way, including by contact with contaminated objects in the canine environment, such as kennels, food and water bowls, collars and leashes. Dog kennels, shelters, "doggie day care centers" and dog parks provide the perfect environment for spreading the illness. CDC [recommendations](#) include:

- Dogs who are coughing or showing other signs of respiratory disease should not be exposed to other dogs.
- Clothing, equipment and hard surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected (see text box above) after exposure to dogs showing signs of respiratory disease.
- Veterinarians and their staff should practice good hand hygiene to help prevent the spread of dog flu.

Our dogs are treasured members of our family units. Many accomplish incredible feats as service, rescue, and emotional support animals. As grateful owners, we can be aware of the dog flu and take smart steps to reduce the risk of infection of our faithful friends.

*Ralph Morris, MD, MPH, is a Physician and Preventive Medicine and Public Health official living in Bemidji, MN.*

#### A Simple Disinfecting Solution

¼ cup of regular household bleach (approximately 6% strength\*) in water makes an effective disinfecting solution for surfaces contaminated with canine influenza virus, such as cages, food and water bowls and exam room surfaces. Note, surfaces should be cleaned of dirt and debris before disinfectant is applied.

\*If using high strength bleach (8.25%), reduce to 2 ½ tablespoons of bleach