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You may have seen recent reports about the dog flu in the news and on the internet. At Read Mountain Animal Hospital, we believe it is important for our clients to have good information about issues concerning their pets' health, so we have prepared this article to answer some of the questions we've been getting.

I have been hearing about a canine influenza outbreak. What's going on?

There was recently an outbreak of canine influenza. It appeared to originate at the Perry, GA dog show, but spread to Florida, Texas, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

Is this like the human flu?

It is very similar. Influenza viruses are named according to certain molecular markers, commonly referred to H and N. The current strain seems to be an H3N2 strain. However, humans can not spread the disease to dogs, nor can humans catch the canine flu.

Haven't we had outbreaks of this before?

Yes, in Chicago and Florida. The current strain appears to be similar to those, although testing is still in progress.

Didn't a lot of dogs die from that?

No. In the Chicago outbreak, there were officially 1,013 dogs affected and 5 deaths. That's a 0.5% mortality rate. Firm statistics on the Florida outbreak are harder to find.

Is there a vaccine?

Yes, although it is not known if the vaccine is effective against the current strain. Also, the vaccine does not prevent the disease, but lessens the severity of the signs.

Is my dog at risk?

Canine influenza spreads in much the same way that human influenza does - by sneezing and other respiratory secretions. Dogs that are in contact with many other dogs, like show dogs and shelter dogs, are at increased risk. Dogs that largely stay

around the house are at decreased risk.

So what should I do?

Firstly, don't panic! The news and other media like to sensationalize everything, but this disease is actually not wreaking havoc in the canine world.

Secondly, if another dog is showing obvious signs of respiratory disease, like coughing, sneezing, milky or colored nasal drainage, keep your dog away!. Keep in mind, there are many diseases of dogs that look and act like the flu - bordatella, parainfluenza, and mycoplasma, just to name a few. Some of these can be prevented with vaccines, but some can not. So just as you wouldn't let your child play with other children who are obviously sick, don't let your dog play with other dogs who are obviously sick!

We do not recommend the influenza vaccine at this time. As mentioned above, there have been very few cases of canine influenza near Virginia, and the vaccine doesn't prevent the disease in the first place. Based on this information, we believe the cost and potential vaccine reactions are not justified at this time.

Above all, if you have questions about this or other pet health matters, call us!