

Killer virus spares county dog population

By TIM RICHARD

A dog-killing virus that is epidemic in other parts of Michigan is still rare in Oakland County. "It's not common in Oakland and Wayne counties. I haven't seen any," said John Richardson, DVM of Farmington, president of the Michigan Veterinary Medical Association.

"But a vet in Monroe has had 60 cases, and I understand it's bad in Grand Rapids, Lansing, Kalamazoo and the west side of the state."

"We've had one confirmed case," said Lois Downes, office manager for Gasov Veterinary Hospital with nine veterinarians in Birmingham. "It was an adult with a litter of pups. The dog died, but the puppies survived."

"There is another case we're suspicious of, and we have some tests in now, but the results aren't back yet."

THE DISEASE is a parvo virus, according to William Schall, DVM, associate professor of small

animal surgery and medicine at Michigan State University.

The chief symptoms are severe diarrhea and sometimes vomiting. The virus infects the lining of the dog's intestinal tract. It may also infect bone marrow and the heart.

When it affects the heart, the virus causes quick death with no indication of illness, Schall said.

When it affects bone marrow, dogs usually have diarrhea and are vulnerable to other infections because the disease-fighting white blood cells are diminished.

A VACCINE is highly effective in preventing the virus.

But Schall, Dr. Richardson and Ms. Downes all reported the vaccine is in short supply.

Parvo virus is spread from dog to dog by the feces, Schall said. Dogs which are in contact with many other dogs, particularly strays, run the greatest risk.

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Richardson said danger spots could be:

- Dog shows.
- Boarding kennels.
- State parks and roadside rest areas.
- Dogs which are confined to a yard run less risk, Ms. Downes added.

WHAT PRECAUTIONS should be taken?

"We have been told only one disinfectant works — one part Clorox to 30 parts water," said

Ms. Downes. "We use it on the examining table after every visit."

"You can use the same solution to disinfect your shoes after visiting a kennel. I hate to see the kennels hurt, but I would hate even more to see the disease spread."

"We would give the same advice to those who have lost a dog — to disinfect the area."

The parvo virus has been reported to great numbers in Chicago, Cleveland, Texas and Florida. Schall said the spread has occurred in the last two years.

"Most mature dogs that contract the disease survive with veterinary medical treatment," he said. "However, many puppies do not survive in spite of treatment."

Richardson said the diagnosis of parvo virus must be confirmed by the MSU laboratory. "Diarrhea or vomiting could be caused by food poisoning. It must be confirmed by MSU before we would call it parvo virus."

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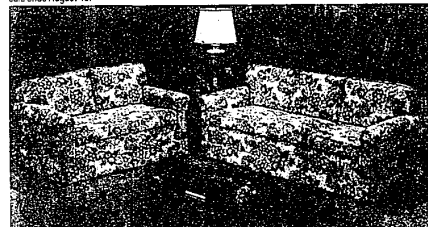
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