

Canine Distemper & Wildlife

Description: Canine distemper is a viral disease that locally affects domestic dogs, raccoons, coyotes, foxes, skunks and weasels. It is a serious disease, and contributed to the near extinction of Colorado's black footed ferrets. Young animals or those with weakened immune systems are the most susceptible, and it spreads easily through infected nose and eye secretions, urine, feces and even food and water than have been exposed. The virus first enters the lymph system, then the blood and finally effects the respiratory, gastrointestinal, urogenital, and central nervous systems. The last stage is when symptoms become noticeable, although there can be an early fever after infection. Canine distemper is not considered a threat to people.



Symptoms: Early symptoms include fever (103°-106 ° F in dogs), loss of appetite, and mild eye inflammation that may only last a day or two. Symptoms progress to eye discharge, diarrhea, fever, pneumonia, runny nose and vomiting. Secondary bacterial infections begin to effect major body functions and animals begin to exhibit encephalitis (brain swelling), loss of coordination, increased sensitivity, twitching or spasms, partial to complete paralysis, deterioration of mental abilities and motor skills and seizures. A “chewing gum” seizure often occurs, that affects the head and makes it appear the animal is chewing gum. Distemper kills approximately 50% of unvaccinated dogs between 2 weeks and 3 months after infection.

Treatment: There is no cure for distemper, and treatment is preventative or supportive once an animal is infected. Recovery of infected animals is due in large part to individual health and immunity. Vaccination is extremely successful in preventing infection and can even potentially help after an initial exposure. The vaccine does need to be readministered annually to ensure continued protection. For an infected animal, keep them isolated from other animals. Anti nausea and anti diarrheal drugs are often used. Keeping eyes and nose free of discharge helps reduce transmission and suffering. Antibiotics are given for pneumonia or other secondary infections. Supportive treatment will vary by the symptoms of the dog.

Wildlife effected: Canine distemper can be transmitted to and from some of our local wildlife



species. While originating in domestic dogs, the disease has spread rapidly to a variety of animal species. Locally there have been outbreaks of distemper in raccoon and to a lesser extent skunk populations. Individual coyotes and foxes have also come down with the disease. Since wildlife is not vaccinated, it is critical to both keep dogs up to date on vaccinations and to make sure they avoid contact with local wildlife. Domestic cats are not effected by canine distemper,

feline distemper is a distinctly different disease, that doesn't affect canid species, but can be transmitted to and from lynx, bobcats, raccoons and possible skunks.

Resources:

Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canine_distemper

Animal Health Channel, <http://www.animalhealthchannel.com/distemper/symptoms.shtml>



Department of Parks & Recreation
Natural Areas Program

5161 Sheridan Blvd.
Denver Colorado 80212
Phone: 303-455-0785