



THE BASICS: CANINE INFLUENZA

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Canine influenza (commonly called dog flu) is a **highly contagious respiratory disease caused by influenza A viruses**. Two strains have been identified in dogs in the United States: H3N8, which was first reported in 2004, and H3N2, which emerged in 2015. Dogs of any breed, age, or health status can be affected.

- Canine influenza is a relatively newer disease, so most dogs have **little to no natural immunity** against it, making them highly susceptible to infection when exposed.
- The virus **spreads through respiratory droplets** from coughing, sneezing, and barking, as well as through contact with contaminated surfaces like bowls, leashes, and clothing.
- Infected dogs can be **contagious even before they show symptoms** and can continue to spread the virus for up to four weeks after initial exposure.
- The virus can **survive on surfaces for up to 48 hours**, on clothing for up to 24 hours, and on hands for up to 12 hours, but common disinfectants easily kill it.
- Indoor settings where dogs gather, such as boarding facilities, shelters, daycare, and grooming salons, pose the **highest risk for transmission**.
- **Canine influenza does not spread to people**. However, people can carry the virus on their hands and clothing and pass it between dogs.



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SYMPTOMS OF CANINE INFLUENZA

Most dogs with canine influenza develop a mild form of the disease. Symptoms can last up to 21 days and may include:

- **Persistent cough (which may last 10–21 days and does not respond to antibiotics)**
- **Sneezing**
- **Nasal and/or eye discharge**
- **Fever**
- **Lethargy or reduced energy**
- **Decreased appetite**



In more severe cases (roughly 10–20% of infected dogs), canine influenza can progress to pneumonia, which may require hospitalization. If your dog is showing signs of respiratory illness, contact your veterinarian.

PREVENTING CANINE INFLUENZA

- Vaccines are available that protect against both the H3N8 and H3N2 strains of canine influenza. Bivalent vaccines that cover both strains in a single shot are generally preferred.
- The canine influenza vaccine requires two initial doses given two to four weeks apart, followed by annual boosters. Dogs can begin the series as early as 6 weeks of age.
- While the vaccine is not considered a core vaccine for all dogs, it's recommended for dogs whose lifestyles put them at higher risk, including those who visit boarding facilities, daycare, dog parks, grooming salons, or dog shows.
- Some facilities may require proof of canine influenza vaccination, especially during outbreaks.

- If your dog is coughing or showing signs of illness, keep them away from other dogs and contact your veterinarian before bringing them in for an exam.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling any dog, and avoid sharing bowls, toys, and other items between dogs outside your household.

TREATMENT OF CANINE INFLUENZA

There is no specific antiviral treatment for canine influenza. Like the flu in people, treatment focuses on keeping your dog comfortable and supporting their immune system while they recover. Your veterinarian may recommend:

- Rest and isolation from other dogs to prevent spreading the virus
- Fluids to maintain hydration
- Cough suppressants and/or appetite stimulants as needed
- Antibiotics if a secondary bacterial infection (such as pneumonia) develops
- Hospitalization and more intensive care for severe cases

Most dogs recover within two to three weeks. The mortality rate for canine influenza is low, but complications like pneumonia can be life-threatening—especially in very young, very old, or immunocompromised dogs

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