



mt. tabor veterinary care

Dear Client,

The purpose of this letter is to help inform you about the new canine influenza virus and answer some basic questions to help guide your decision about vaccination.

What is the canine influenza virus?

The canine influenza virus, like the human flu virus, has a few strains. Several years ago the H3N8 canine influenza virus emerged. A vaccine is available, but due to its relatively low infection rate, we chose not to carry this vaccine, as did many clinics in our area. In the last year, a new H3N2 strain emerged which is thought to have mutated from an avian influenza virus in Korea.

This virus is affecting dogs in the United States and appears to spread faster, shed longer, and have the potential to be more virulent (or make dogs more sick) than the H3N8 strain. This virus is contagious up to 3 days BEFORE any signs are noted in dogs and can be contagious up to weeks afterwards. In addition, dogs in the US have no immunity to influenza, and therefore nearly all exposed dogs will become infected. The first outbreak of the H3N2 virus was noted in Chicago in March 2015, and the closest outbreak that we have seen is in Seattle. There have been no positive cases in Oregon at this time (February 2016).

Influenza usually causes mild illness such as a runny nose and cough. About 8% of infected dogs will develop severe illness, such as pneumonia, which can be fatal. There is no evidence that this virus can spread to other species.

Is there a vaccine available for my pet?

Zoetis and Merck have created vaccines against H3N2 influenza, with a conditional license. This means that the FDA has allowed its release in order to get it on the market quickly, but the usual rigorous testing required of vaccines has not been completed at this time. This testing is underway. The vaccine is created on the same platform as other influenza vaccines, so there is no expectation that it would not be effective or safe. In addition, these companies offer comprehensive product safety and efficacy guarantees for this vaccine.

The vaccine is labeled for use in dogs 8 weeks or older and is a killed virus, like the rabies vaccine. It requires a booster 2-4 weeks after the first dose, and immunity is complete two weeks after the second booster. Because of the long period between initiation of the vaccine series and onset of immunity, it is important to note that starting the vaccine series after an outbreak occurs may not protect your dog in time. It will require an annual booster to maintain protection if the virus is still present in the canine population.

Should I vaccinate my dog?

Whether or not you should vaccinate your dog depends on their health status, their exposure to other dogs, and in general, your risk tolerance. Dogs belonging to veterinary workers or pet care industry workers are at particular risk. Mt. Tabor is now carrying the H3N2 canine influenza vaccine for those clients who wish to vaccinate their dogs. You may schedule a nurse appointment if you know you want this vaccine for your dog AND your dog is at least 8 weeks old with no health concerns AND your dog has been seen in the last 6 months. Otherwise, you will need to schedule a doctor visit for an examination and to discuss whether this vaccine is appropriate for your dog. If you have further questions, you can call us or email us and we will be happy to discuss with you.

Finally, if your dog is showing any signs of respiratory illness, please call us for recommendations, and please keep them isolated from other dogs.

Sincerely,

The Mt. Tabor Veterinary Care Staff