**Distemper FAQs**

**What is Canine Distemper?**

Canine distemper is a virus affecting dogs. It’s found most often in the southern states. The virus can impact all systems in the body, but typically starts with upper respiratory signs and can sometimes progress to neurological symptoms.

**What are the signs/symptoms?**

Distemper often starts looking like kennel cough- some discharge from the eyes or nose, coughing, sneezing, etc. The following signs are more indicative of distemper specifically, and we recommend talking to your vet immediately if you see them.

1. A lack of interest in food.
2. Extreme lethargy (it is ok to sleep and take naps but not be lethargic all day long).
3. Severe nasal discharge, or discharge or crust in/around the eyes (or continued squinting).
4. Severe coughing, especially if it is accompanied by heavy breathing.
5. Tremors of muscles (not regular old shivering but spasms) or seizures.
6. Change in skin condition or foul odor occurring, even after bathing.
7. Inability to walk straight or giving the appearance of being off balance.

**Is it contagious? How is it spread?**

Distemper is contagious to other dogs, and is spread much the same way a cold is with humans: through saliva and mucous. Dogs can contract the disease when an infected dog sneezes or coughs near/on them, through nose-to-nose contact, and sometimes through shared water bowls.

**Are other dogs at home safe? Are cats/kids affected?**

The best way to keep a dog safe from distemper is to vaccinate- the DAPP (or DHPP) vaccine is highly effective! Follow your vet’s guidelines and make sure your dogs are up to date on their vaccines. Other species like cats and humans can’t get canine distemper. If you have a dog under 4 months without 3 vaccinations, an immunocompromised older dog, or a dog not up to date on vaccinations, they may be at risk.

**Is it treatable?**

Yes! Treating distemper can take time, but the disease is treatable. We treat the symptoms as they occur and support the dog’s immune system to help them fight the virus off. If you notice any of the signs listed, please contact your veterinarian immediately, as early treatment is critical.

**How long does it last?**

Once exposed, a dog typically begins showing symptoms 1-2 weeks after. The symptoms can last and progress for a matter of weeks, and the dog can still “shed” (spread) the virus for several months afterwards. If you suspect that your dog has had/survived distemper, please use caution before allowing your dog to interact with other dogs during the first few months to avoid spreading the disease to under vaccinated dogs.

**What about surgery?**

In some cases, we may process a Foster to Adopt (rather than an adoption) and ask the adopter to wait before we schedule spay/neuter surgery for their new pet. Because surgery can be so hard on the dog’s immune system, we want to give them lots of time to get to peak wellness and fight off the virus before surgery.

**Who’s at risk?**

Any dog who has not received a DAPP vaccination or immunocompromised dogs could be at risk of contracting the distemper virus.

**Why is there an increase?**

As with any disease, there’s always a risk for distemper in our community. Unfortunately, Texas sees a lot of distemper. In the last year after Hurricane Harvey, many shelters in the area have reported increased rates of distemper.

**What is AAC doing to mitigate this issue?**

In addition to strict vaccination protocols that were already in place, we are separating all new dogs in isolation for 72 hours minimum to ensure that their vaccination has given them good immunity before they are able to go for walks, join playgroups, or interact with other dogs. This helps to ensure that no new dogs will catch the virus. We’re also aggressively treating any signs of upper respiratory infection (just in case it’s the beginning of distemper), and working with our partners at Austin Pets Alive! to ensure that every dog gets the best possible chance to fight the virus. In addition, consultants from APA! are working onsite at AAC to mitigate the chance of spreading the virus. We are notifying adopters, fosters, and rescue partners of potential risks. While we are treating this disease risk seriously, our team is confident that we have the expertise and knowledge to handle it swiftly and appropriately.