Common Canine Health Problems

**Fleas**
Fleas tend to be more of a seasonal concern being the most prevalent in the summer and early fall. Often the first time you might notice fleas is when they bite you and your family, so watch closely for the symptoms of fleas on your dog and use protective measures to prevent them. The warning signs of fleas are excessive biting, scratching, and rubbing by your companion animal, small but visible fast-moving brownish-black bugs, multiple skin irritations caused by the flea bites and noticeable "flea dirt;" these are the small black feces of the flea. To test for fleas, moisten a sheet of white paper and hold it under your dog. Briskly comb the dog's fur. Any "flea dirt" which falls onto the paper will produce a visible red bloodstain. To prevent fleas keep your dog away from unfamiliar animals, especially wild animals. Vacuum and clean the carpet, furniture, and the dog's bedding repeatedly to remove fleas and eggs. Fleas on your dog can be controlled with many different treatments available from your vet. All animals in the home must be treated for fleas as well. Ask your vet for the best way to treat your home and yard for fleas.

**Ear Mites**
Ear mites are insects that are too small to see with the naked eye. If the condition goes untreated, ear mites may cause a secondary infection that must also be treated. Ear mites are transmitted by direct contact between your pet and another infected animal, so be sure to keep your dog away from other animals that have ear mites. Symptoms are the vigorous shaking, scratching, or rubbing of the affected ear and a thick black crust formed in the ear canal of the animal. If you suspect your dog may have ear mites, it is advised that you have your veterinarian check your dog's ears. Your veterinarian can recommend the appropriate treatment since many forms of treatment can be effective. The pet should be immediately isolated from other animals until completion of the treatment.

**Kennel Cough**
Kennel cough is a highly contagious viral disease, especially for dogs, which are closely confined, under a lot of stress or in the cold or drafts. See your veterinarian to make sure your dog is vaccinated against kennel cough, especially if your dog will be in close contact with other dogs as kennel cough requires direct contact with an infected dog to be spread. Symptoms first appear five to ten days after the dog has been infected. Kennel cough is characterized by harsh, dry coughing which may be followed by gagging and retching. This is sometimes accompanied by sneezing and a clear watery discharge from the nose. Although the cough is described as "dry" it is common for dogs to cough up varying amounts of saliva and mucus. Kennel cough may cause a secondary infection, which will produce a fever, loss of appetite and depression. In most cases of healthy dogs, the viral disease runs its course in 10 to 12 days. Any secondary infection should be treated with an antibiotic from your veterinarian. A healthy dog will get over kennel cough; much like a human gets over the common cold. Kennel cough can, however, be fatal to puppies, aged or debilitated dogs. Humans cannot catch kennel cough. If the cough does not subside in 21 days, contact your veterinarian.

**Otitis**
Otitis occurs when moisture collects in the ear canal resulting in decreased air circulation, inflammation, and eventually infection. Factors contributing to Otitis include excess hair in the ear canal, a history of allergies, floppy ears or wet ears. Typically you will notice your pet scratching at his ears or shaking his head. Additionally a strong odor about the face or ears may be detected as well as redness in the ears or an increase of wax in the canal. If severe or left untreated, the infection
can result in rupture of the eardrum, excessive growth of the tissues of the ear canal, and even deafness. **To prevent Otitis** it is helpful to remove excess hair from the ear canal. This can be done by a groomer, veterinarian or by the guardian if properly trained. For dogs with floppy ears it is important to clean the ears every two to three months. Dogs that are in the water frequently should have their ears dried by swabbing with a dry cotton ball. If you notice any redness, discharge, or foul odor of the ears it is important to contact your veterinarian for proper care and treatment of your pet's ears.

**Heartworm**

Heartworm is a blood parasite that can be transmitted to dogs through a mosquito bite. After a six-month incubation period, the adult worms, which can reach a length of 11 inches, can be found in the heart and main blood vessels to the lungs. **Heartworm can cause** severe respiratory signs, heart failure, and death. Treatment is available and is successful in most cases but does present certain risks. Luckily, heartworm disease is preventable! **Monthly medications are available** that will prevent heartworm, but it is important to have your veterinarian blood test your dog, since a heartworm positive dog should not be started on the preventative medication. Preventative medication is usually given in the months that mosquitoes are more prevalent, typically April through November. Due to milder winters in the recent years some veterinarians may advise to give heartworm preventatives all year long. **Please talk to your veterinarian about the prevention of this serious disease.**

**Parvovirus**

Often called "Parvo," parvovirus, is contagious to dogs only-not to cats or people. **Signs include** vomiting, fever, and bloody diarrhea with a very foul odor. The younger the dog, the greater the chance it will NOT recover. The virus may attack the heart muscle causing inflammation of the heart muscle. Dogs with canine parvovirus infection shed massive amounts of virus in the feces. **Parvovirus is transmitted through** the feces of an infected dog. It can be carried on dog's hair and feet as well as live on contaminated rugs, bedding, shoes, and other objects. **An effective cleaning disinfectant is 4 ounces of bleach in one gallon of water.** Dogs remain highly susceptible to parvo until two weeks after the last injection of the immunization series. **Death from parvo may result** from dehydration, overwhelming bacterial infection from the pet's lowered resistance, blood loss from internal hemorrhage or possible heart attack from invasion of the heart muscle by the virus. In parvovirus, the pet often becomes "dehydrated" from the vomiting, diarrhea, and inability to consume fluids. Life is NOT possible when 12-15% of the normal body fluids are lost. This is the reason fluid therapy is so important in treating parvovirus. Treatment is aimed at maintaining the normal body composition and preventing secondary bacterial infection. We have no cure for any animal virus, just as there is no cure for any human virus.

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Whenever you suspect an illness, infection or virus of your dog, please contact your veterinarian immediately.