

Red Flag Medical Conditions

To stop disease outbreaks before they start, shelter staff should look for symptoms of infectious disease in individual animals during daily rounds. Here's what to watch out for.

Intake exams, daily monitoring and rounds help to identify medical concerns in shelter animals early. In a shelter – with so many lives at risk – it is best to err on the side of caution when it comes to infectious disease. Recognizing and responding to medical conditions efficiently and effectively not only in the best interest of the individual animal, it also helps to limit the exposure risk to other animals in the population if the cause is infectious.

The following clinical signs indicate a health risk for the individual or the population:

- Labored breathing or difficulty breathing
- Severe lethargy or is non-responsive
- Seizures
- Active bleeding or there is a large amount of blood in its housing unit
- Watery diarrhea with or without blood
- Animal that is straining to urinate or defecate
- Evidence of pain such as restlessness, vocalizing or panting
- Vomiting not associated with having just eaten
- Neurologic signs such as ataxia (difficult standing/walking), pupils of different sizes, circling in one direction, falling to one side, etc.
- Circular patches of hairloss
- Dead in cage – always check for parvovirus/panleukopenia

These signs CAN be seen with common and potentially serious infectious disease. Some of these signs can also be seen with many other, less worrisome problems. Either way, all of these clinical signs require immediate attention and a protocol must be in place to respond to them quickly.