

Should my shelter be vaccinating dogs for Canine Influenza (CIV)?

Dr. Dines discusses the considerations for use of influenza vaccination in a shelter setting

Question:

We are receiving some pressure to begin vaccinating against canine influenza upon intake, but there seems to be a high level of controversy regarding the need and efficacy of doing this. What are your thoughts? Do you know if other high volume, open intake shelters in affected and not yet affected states are doing it?

Answer:

Great question, as this is really a hot topic right now.

We routinely do not recommend influenza vaccination for shelters. There are a couple of reasons why:

1. It takes at least 4 weeks and up to 6 weeks, depending on vaccine labeling, to complete the vaccines series. In most shelter situations (especially high volume, open intake) we would prioritize [lessened length of stay](#). Instead of focusing on the vaccination, we would rather have resources directed to obtaining live outcomes for animals while decreasing their length of stay. Ideally, dogs would not stay in the shelter for the 4-6 weeks needed for the influenza vaccine to become effective so vaccination would not be of any benefit.
2. The vaccine does not provide sterile immunity. This means it does not completely prevent infection, it simply makes it less likely. The vaccines are only labeled for aiding in the control of the disease. In the event a vaccinated dog becomes infected, he/she will likely have more mild symptoms, for a shorter time, but could still be sick with influenza. There are many other components that can aid in control of disease. Functioning at your true [capacity for care](#) and decreasing length of stay for animals are two critical ones. Since influenza is extremely contagious and the vaccine does not provide complete prevention, infection is still able to occur at the shelter amongst the population.

To give you a real-world experience, I worked in a shelter that had a flu outbreak, where no animals were vaccinated. I also provided consultation through University of Wisconsin for another shelter that had a flu outbreak where all animals were adequately vaccinated (had received both boosters). The outcome was the same. Both shelters needed to temporarily shut down so that new animals were not infected and infected animals were not released in to the community, while testing occurred to deem animals clear of infection eventually. All animals had to be treated symptomatically and with supportive care.

There are other ways beside vaccination to be proactive with regards to preventing the flu in dogs. One of the most important steps is to screen new intakes for coughing or clinical signs, with the understanding that not all dogs will be clinical for influenza on presentation. However, making the choice to defer an actively coughing dog if possible is generally a good choice. Obtaining a history when possible at the time of intake, such as owner reported history of recent respiratory disease signs or recent travel from Asia may also be helpful in preventing the introduction of influenza to your shelter. Training your staff to recognize and report disease is also critical, so that if an outbreak is occurring it can be addressed promptly.

Vaccination of owned dogs in the community may be beneficial in reducing transmission of influenza within the canine population on a broader level.

For more information on CIV, read our [information sheet on Canine Influenza](#). If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to ask!

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