Five Confirmed Cases of Distemper
Animal Services On Alert

Santa Barbara County Animal Services is asking the community to be on high alert after identifying five confirmed cases of canine distemper in Santa Maria. If residents notice any distemper symptoms in a dog or have questions about a dog’s vaccination history, they are asked to contact a veterinarian.

Canine distemper is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus that attacks the respiratory, gastrointestinal, and nervous system of dogs and puppies. The infected dogs seen in our area have ranged in age from one to six years. Although distemper is most commonly seen in puppies or immune compromised dogs it can affect any unvaccinated dog.

Distemper symptoms typically appear in three phases; the respiratory phase, the mucosal phase, and the neurologic phase. The first symptoms to appear are gooey green or pus like discharge from the eyes and nose, poor appetite, a fever that may go unnoticed, and coughing which can lead to pneumonia. The second phase can include vomiting and diarrhea. In the final phase dogs may start having seizures, tremors, snapping or tremors of the jaws, imbalance, and limb weakness.

Of the five confirmed cases one was loose on the streets of Santa Maria and the other four were dogs brought in from areas outside of Santa Barbara County. Most distemper vaccinations are coupled with a parvo virus vaccination but all dog owners are urged to double check their pet’s vaccination record to ensure the distemper vaccination was received and is up to date. All County residents are urged to keep their puppies safe by not letting them outside their fenced yards or putting them on the ground in public places until they are fully vaccinated.

Canine distemper is most commonly spread through coughing infected respiratory secretions but can also be shed through most other bodily secretions, including urine. The distemper virus moves quickly, however it can take one to three weeks, or longer, after exposure before the neurological symptoms appear.

Should you notice any of these symptoms in your dog or have questions about your dog’s vaccination history please contact your veterinarian. The cost of prevention is much cheaper than the cost of treatment so make sure your dog is vaccinated today.

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