

PRESS STATEMENT

11 February 2008

NGRC working with Animal Health Trust to identify cause of unusual greyhound deaths

The NGRC has recently become aware of unusual deaths in residential greyhound kennels. The Area Stipendiary Stewards' early warning surveillance scheme has identified a cluster and several scattered cases of a severe illness in greyhounds characterised by breathing difficulties and bleeding in the respiratory system which may be fatal within hours.

In America, equine flu has been reported to have caused a similar syndrome in greyhounds, but it has not been reported in the UK.

The NGRC has assisted the Animal Health Trust at Newmarket, leaders in this field of research and knowledge, to monitor the incidence in greyhounds in the UK. To date equine flu has not been identified as crossing from horses to greyhounds.

However, the recent deaths show a number of similarities with the American cases, so the NGRC is working closely with the Animal Health Trust specialist team to identify the cause as quickly as possible so that detailed disease plans can be put in place, if necessary. This information will be made available in the form of press statements and on the NGRC website as soon as it is available. We expect to have further information later today or early tomorrow.

The American cases and those in hounds in the UK have shown an association with feeding horse meat, and it appears that the virus can 'jump' species. There is less evidence of dog-to-dog transfer, although this cannot be ruled out.

Whilst it is important not to jump to conclusions before all the facts are known, there are some precautions which the NGRC recommends as appropriate in the current circumstances:

- Monitor all greyhounds closely for signs of ill health. Call your veterinary surgeon for advice and examination at the earliest opportunity if a greyhound is off-colour for no obvious reason. Should there be a suspected case the NGRC will co-ordinate the investigation of the likely cause.
- Inform the Area Stipendiary Steward who will be monitoring the ongoing situation with the NGRC Veterinary, Welfare and Scientific Committee.
- DO NOT feed horse meat, and avoid contact with horses as far as possible.
- Good hygiene is invaluable. Effective cleaning should be followed by disinfection daily, and when greyhounds join or leave kennels. Detailed information is given below. Not all disinfectants are very effective and very few work unless physical dirt is removed first.

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- Good ventilation will help to reduce the likelihood of airborne infections spreading
- Avoid moving and mixing greyhounds whenever possible. It would be wise to put a hold on any new entrants to the kennels or any onward sales for a few days until the position is clearer. If that is unavoidable, use the isolation kennel for at least 3 days to observe the new arrival and make sure it seems to be well before it joins the main kennel strength.
- Do not jump to conclusions - we do not yet know if this is equine flu or indeed a transmissible infection, but will keep the sport up to date while advising sensible precautions in the meantime.

Recommendations for Cleaning and Disinfection

This is the single most important thing to do to avoid any infections, and should be a daily routine in all kennels, racing or residential, cages, and vehicles:

- Scrub all surfaces with hot water and detergent (washing up liquid is cheap and effective). Remove all particles of faeces, food, bedding, grease etc from all areas paying special attention to the corners. Bedding must be replaced.
- Rinse away all the dirty water; remove as much free water as possible using a brush or rubber scraper which has also been cleaned.
- Using a hand-held sprayer such as a house plant sprayer (easy to direct, cheap, and economical with the contents) spray all surfaces with a solution of virus-killing disinfectant such as Parvocide or Virkon S made up to the correct strength. This is then allowed to dry on the surface.

This will kill almost all viruses and bacteria. Without removing the organic material first, the detergent and disinfectant will not make contact with infective organisms and so can't kill them. Physical cleaning is the first, very important step.

This is an economical way of thorough cleaning, and will be more effective than steam cleaning, pressure washing or disinfectants applied without prior physical cleaning.

Parvocide and Virkon S is much less likely to cause skin irritation than some other disinfectants which are in any case less effective.

This routine will reduce substantially the risk of any infection spreading within or between kennels.

Further information will follow as soon as it becomes available.

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