



ARIZONA HUMANE SOCIETY

Canine Distemper Frequently Asked Questions

As temperatures fluctuate, the Valley often sees an increase in highly-infectious, highly-contagious diseases such as distemper. In an effort to be proactive and to ensure the safety of our pets, AHS aims to educate the community on distemper, what pet owners can do in the event their pet gets sick, and the importance of vaccinating pets.

What is distemper?

Distemper is an extremely contagious, airborne disease that is spread in body excretions & through inhalation. It reproduces in lymph nodes before entering the blood stream & cell lining of the respiratory, urogenital, gastrointestinal & central nervous system.

How does distemper spread?

- Direct contact
- Aerosol – sneezing, coughing
- Bodily secretions
- Fomites – hands, clothing, improperly cleaned equipment/leashes

What causes distemper?

Although distemper is a viral infection, Maricopa County's very serious pet overpopulation problem does not help. A great number of homeless animals do not have their vaccines until they arrive at Valley shelters, making it very difficult to control.

What are the clinical signs of distemper?

- Respiratory signs can include discharge from the eyes/nose and coughing (presents very similar to URI)
- Gastrointestinal signs including vomiting and diarrhea
- Fever, lethargy
- Neurological signs include tremors, "bubble gum" chewing, seizures
- Canine distemper virus is sometimes known as "hard pad disease" due to the callusing of nose/foot pads

Dogs can be shedding the virus without showing severe clinical signs and can continue to shed up to four weeks post infection.

Is distemper easy to diagnose?

Symptoms can vary from dog to dog; therefore diagnosis can be very complicated; however, if symptoms are presented together, diagnosis is quite accurate.

Is there a cure for distemper?

Although distemper may be manageable in a few cases, currently there is no known cure; therefore, the mortality rate is quite high.

Can an animal be tested for distemper?

There are diagnostic tests, but they have limitations based on the interpretation of the test. Test results also take a minimum of three days.

Will my house need to be decontaminated?

Unlike the canine parvovirus, the canine distemper virus does not typically survive long outside the body; however, the disinfecting of one's home is still very necessary. Cleaning protocols for areas in contact with the illness include disinfecting backyards and certain areas of the home with a 1:32 concentration of bleach and water as well as deep cleaning all carpets. Extra care must be taken in cleaning bowls, toys and other objects that have come in contact with that pet.

Do AHS pets receive distemper vaccinations?

AHS vaccinates all animals upon intake into the shelter (including the distemper vaccine), but the community must be diligent and update their pet's vaccinations as directed by their veterinarian.

Who is at highest risk for distemper?

Puppies under 6 months of age as well as older dogs with unconfirmed vaccination histories are at highest risk; therefore, it is very important that puppies receive their "puppy shots" and that owners of adult dogs remain diligent in vaccinating their pets throughout their lifetime based on their veterinarian's guidelines. In addition, it is important that people are very careful when taking their pets to communal areas such as dog parks or areas where unknown dogs are present.

What is the vaccination cycle?

Puppies are to receive three distemper vaccinations every 3-4 weeks, starting at 6 weeks of age until 16 weeks of age.

Older dogs typically receive distemper vaccinations annually; however, AHS treats every dog as if it was never vaccinated and vaccinates them more frequently. AHS' dogs receive their first vaccination upon arrival at AHS and another distemper vaccination 2-3 weeks later. Again, it is important to follow your veterinarian's guidelines.

What can the community do to prevent distemper?

Vaccinate their pets! AHS offers low-cost vaccination clinics every Friday and also holds mobile vaccination clinics for people concerned with the costs associated with vaccinating their pets.

Where can I get my pet vaccinated?

AHS has [two affordable public clinics](#) that offer low-cost vaccine clinics on a first-come, first-serve basis every Friday.

How much do AHS vaccines cost?

Just \$21 per vaccination and Friday vaccine clinics do not charge an office visit fee.