

The University of Florida sent out a bulletin June 14 at 7 AM, reporting 25 active cases hospitalized for H3N2 at their facility at this time. These numbers are considered an epidemic level of patients.

There are two distinct strains of flu in dogs. The first cases of H3N8 were seen in 2004, and since that time some dogs may have been exposed and have built up some immunity to H3N8. However, the first outbreaks of H3N2 were reported in 2015. The H3N2 Influenza strain is a novel virus for almost ALL dogs. Since it is new to dogs, most have had no exposure and hence no immunity to this strain of influenza virus. Most of the cases in recent news have been of the H3N2 strain of influenza, although a few dogs also tested positive for the H3N8 strain. At a large dog show less than a month ago, only 45 minutes north of Tallahassee, over 230 dogs were stricken with flu with almost 100% of the dogs at the show reporting illness within 7 days of the end of the show. Four deaths were reported, and an average of 10 days of hospitalization was required in those dogs requiring hospitalization. Overall, recent statistics show over 600 dogs (in the southeast) affected by the virus in a small period of time.

Dogs that are exposed to the virus have nearly a 100% chance of contracting the disease! Symptoms of the virus include coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, lethargy, weight loss, dehydration, vomiting, and inappetence. Any dog that is around other dogs is at risk, especially puppies and older or immunocompromised dogs or dogs that go to a boarding facility, groomer, day care, or dog park. Puppies and older or immunocompromised dogs also have a greater risk for potentially life-threatening complications such as pneumonia.

The incubation period for the virus (the time from exposure to the first symptoms) is 2-7 days, with infected individuals shedding the virus for several days before they are even symptomatic. Symptoms may last anywhere from 7 days up to 3 weeks. Dogs can continue to shed the virus for up to 4 weeks after symptoms start. It is vitally important to isolate sick pets for at least 4 weeks from the first onset of symptoms.

Vaccination for the flu does not eliminate the risk of contracting the virus. While most vaccinated dogs will not get the flu or show any symptoms, some vaccinated dogs will still develop mild symptoms, with a much lower risk of potentially life-threatening complications. Vaccinated dogs will likely shed the influenza virus for a shorter period of time than non-vaccinated dogs. Please note that we will be using a vaccination that provides protection from both strains of flu (called a bivalent vaccine). This bivalent vaccination is new in 2017 and so it is highly unlikely that your dog, even if vaccinated for flu previously, has received vaccination for both strains. If your dog received a vaccination for flu prior to 2015, it is likely to have only been against H3N8. H3N2 didn't show up in canines until 2014, with the first vaccination for it released in 2015. If your pet has been vaccinated for flu previously, you should check with your veterinarian as to which strains were given at that time. Then make a decision to booster one strain and vaccinate against the new one, etc, to ensure that your pet is protected against both strains.