



media *release*

Monday 12 August

**DOG OWNERS WARNED TO STAY ALERT AS CASES OF
MYSTERY DOG ILLNESS EXPECTED TO REOCCUR**
Animal Health Trust continues investigation into Seasonal Canine Illness

Leading veterinary charity, the Animal Health Trust, is warning dog owners to stay vigilant for the signs of seasonal canine illness (SCI), a mystery illness which in recent years made a number of dogs walked in woodlands suddenly become ill.

Cases of SCI are usually seen from August to November with dogs showing clinical signs of vomiting, diarrhoea and/or lethargy within 24 to 72 hours of walking in woodland. Dog owners are advised to seek immediate veterinary advice should they see these signs in their dog following a woodland walk.

The AHT has been investigating SCI since the end of 2010 at five sites across Norfolk, Nottinghamshire and Suffolk.

Charlotte Robin, SCI Research Co-ordinator at the AHT, said: "We've had a fantastic response to our request for information from dog owners who have walked at our study sites, but unfortunately this information doesn't yet point to a definitive cause.

"We're delighted that since our investigation started fewer dogs have died from SCI.* We hope this is due to increased awareness of the condition and that dog owners now know to contact a vet for advice if they spot any of the clinical signs. Information provided to us certainly shows that if dogs get veterinary treatment quickly for SCI signs, they tend to recover within seven-10 days.

Despite no definite cause being recognised, the AHT has identified a number of common themes which may increase a dog's susceptibility to SCI.

Charlotte added: "A number of cases reported to us have had an infestation of harvest mites. Similarly, our evidence shows that dogs which have travelled further to one of the study sites have more chance of developing SCI. At the moment we do not know if this is an effect of potential immunity in local dogs, or another factor due to dogs travelling long distances."

The AHT is advising dog owners planning to visit woodlands this autumn to ensure that their pets are up-to-date with preventive treatments for external parasites. Products available without prescription may not offer sufficient protection against mites so please contact your local vet to discuss which options are suitable.

If you are travelling with your dog, ensure a supply of fresh water is always available and give your dog plenty of breaks from the heat of the car. Also bear in mind that accommodation such as conservatories and caravans heat up incredibly quickly and may lead to dehydration in your dog.

Charlotte said: "We cannot say for definite that travel or Harvest mites are associated with causing SCI, but ensuring your dog has access to clean water and is protected from external parasites is all part of good dog ownership. Talk to your vet about spray treatments which can be applied to feet, legs and other exposed areas of skin immediately before walking as these may offer better protection against mites than spot-on treatments. These may just help in giving your pet a better chance of avoiding SCI."

The AHT continues to ask dog owners who walk their dogs at any of the five study sites: Sandringham Estate or Thetford Forest, Norfolk, Clumber Park or Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire or Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk, to complete its online questionnaire at www.aht.org.uk/sci

Charlotte added: "We desperately need information from dogs which have been walked at any of our study sites, even if they did not become ill. The information we can glean from owners of dogs who walked at the sites and didn't show clinical signs of SCI is just as important to our investigation, as information from affected dogs."

The veterinary charity is quick to highlight that dogs could be a risk of SCI walking at any woodland during autumn, so it advises dog owners to remain vigilant and to seek veterinary advice immediately if they suspect their dog has SCI.

Ends

For further information, please contact:

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Additional notes:

* In 2012, less than two per cent of cases reported to the AHT resulted in death, this was significantly fewer than in 2010 when 20% of cases resulted in death.

- The Animal Health Trust (AHT) is an independent charity, employing over 200 scientists, vets and support workers. It aims to improve the health and welfare of horses, dogs and cats through research. It also provides specialist referral services and continuous education to vets. Visit the website at www.aht.org.uk
- In September 2010, the AHT was asked by the Sandringham Estate to investigate the illness on its site. Since the investigation began, more cases have been identified across Norfolk, Nottinghamshire and Suffolk and the AHT has been working with the Natural History Museum, the Institute of Zoology, the University of Liverpool, the AHVLA, the National Trust, Nottinghamshire County Council and the Forestry Commission on the investigation. The Camping and Caravanning Club and the Environment Agency have also assisted the investigation
- The AHT is grateful to The Kennel Club for helping with funding towards the investigation. The funding, which started in January 2012, has enabled the AHT to appoint a dedicated SCI coordinator
- The AHT advises any dog owner who is concerned about their dog's health, or if their dog is experiencing vomiting, diarrhoea and lethargy to contact their vet immediately.