



# media *release*

Wednesday 2 October 2013

## **AHT tightens net on Harvest mites as possible cause of seasonal canine illness (SCI)**

Veterinary charity, the Animal Health Trust has begun a pilot study to investigate a possible link between SCI and Harvest mites, continuing an initial study on the possible cause of SCI funded by the Kennel Club.

SCI is a mystery illness which in recent years has 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.

So far this year, there have been 49 cases in total reported to the AHT, from across all of its current investigation sites. A number of cases reported to the charity have shown evidence of Harvest mite infestation.

Charlotte Robin, SCI Research Co-ordinator at the AHT, said: "To enable us to eliminate Harvest mites as a potential cause of SCI, we are advising dog owners to treat their dogs with a fipronil spray directly before walking in woodlands."

There are currently no licenced products that will specifically prevent against Harvest mites, however Fipronil spray is believed to be effective in preventing other mites. The researchers believe that it is important that dog owners use the spray and not the spot-on treatment, which may not provide the same level of localised protection

on vulnerable areas. The spray is a prescription-only product, so a prescription from your vet is required to purchase it.

Charlotte added: "Dog owners need to be aware that using fipronil spray may not protect their dog from SCI, but it could protect them from Harvest mites and other external parasites. What we are trying to do with this study is eliminate the Harvest mite and other external parasites from our enquiries.

"Clearly if Harvest mites are not causing SCI then using fipronil spray is not going to stop dogs from contracting SCI, so please remain vigilant for the clinical signs in your dog and contact your vet immediately for advice if you suspect something is wrong."

In addition to advising all dog owners walking their dogs in woodlands during autumn to use fipronil spray as an external parasite treatment, the AHT is working with the Sandringham Estate in Norfolk to offer to offer dog owners who wish to participate in the study access to the spray free of charge, if deemed appropriate by their veterinary surgeon.

As this is a prescription only medicine, the charity is issuing vouchers to dog owners which they can redeem for fipronil spray through their local vet practice, on the proviso their dog is deemed a suitable candidate by their vet.

Dog owners who meet the criteria and wish to participate in the study will be required to complete a SCI online questionnaire following their visit to the Estate, and an additional follow-up questionnaire regarding the pilot study, regardless of whether their dog was taken ill or not.

You can register to take part in the pilot study at [www.aht.org.uk/scipilotstudy](http://www.aht.org.uk/scipilotstudy)

**Ends**

**For further information, please contact:**

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**Additional notes:**

- 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](http://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, The Caravan 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.