



media release

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

A leading veterinary charity is issuing an alert to dog owners across the country, asking them to stay vigilant for signs of a mystery illness which can kill dogs.

In the last week, the AHT has been made aware of new cases of Seasonal Canine Illness (SCI) across Norfolk, Nottinghamshire and Suffolk.

During autumn 2009 and 2010, several dogs which had been walked in woodlands suddenly became ill. In some cases, dogs didn't recover. Responding to this, the Animal Health Trust (AHT) launched an investigation into SCI.

Richard Newton of the AHT, said: "We want to arm dog owners with as much information as we can. Unfortunately we are looking for a small needle in a very large hay stack so this could take some time.

"We weren't aware of any cases in 2011, then suddenly at the start of September we had a flurry of reports. Vets and dog owners seem to be more aware of this illness this year and this has helped enormously with our investigation.

"Because dog owners, or vets treating the animals, have contacted us as soon as the dogs have been taken ill, we've been able to identify specific areas where these dogs

have been walked. This is helping to focus our investigation on smaller geographical areas, hopefully, meaning that we're getting closer to the culprit."

Although clinical signs of SCI, which include vomiting, diarrhoea and lethargy are fairly common and non-specific, it is their onset within only a few hours of dogs walking in woodlands that is distinctive. The AHT is advising any dog owners who see these signs in their pet to access veterinary treatment immediately.

For the purpose of its investigation the AHT is focussing its data collection on four previously affected sites: Sandringham Estate and Thetford Forest in Norfolk and Clumber Park and Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire.

Richard Newton, added: "We do not believe that dogs are at any more risk walking at the four sites we're investigating than at any other woodland site. We simply need to limit our investigation area in order to get the most useful data.

"Nearly 400 people completed questionnaires last autumn after walking dogs in these areas but we were also alerted to other areas, across the whole of the UK, where dog owners believe cases had occurred."

The AHT is asking dog owners who have walked their dogs at any of the four study sites since 1 August 2011 to complete and return the relevant questionnaire. Even if your dog has not been taken ill your information will be invaluable to the investigation. Questionnaires, and further information, are available from the website: www.aht.org.uk

Richard Newton, said: "So far in 2011 we haven't had any reports of dogs dying from SCI. We believe people are being vigilant and are seeking veterinary help at the first sign of illness – by doing this dog owners really are giving their pet the best chance of fighting SCI. "

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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
- 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 and Nottinghamshire and the AHT has been working with the National Trust and the Forestry Commission on this investigation. The Camping and Caravanning Club and the Environment Agency have also assisted the investigation.
- 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
- The AHT has produced an informative video about SCI which can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGiXBrp7-n4&NR=1> Please link to this video from any online media outlets so that dog owners can find out more.