



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Don Bland, Chief Animal Services Officer *Don Bland*

THROUGH: Stephanie Hayden-Howard, LMSW, Assistant City Manager

DATE: August 23, 2023

SUBJECT: Disease Management Protocols

Please use this memorandum in response to emails sent to the Mayor, Council, and Interim City Manager regarding the Animal Services Office's (ASO) disease management efforts.

As stated in the [press release issued on August 10, 2023](#), the Austin Animal Center (AAC) has seen a rise in cases of distemper within the canine population. From mid-July to the beginning of August, AAC saw six confirmed distemper cases and several presumptive cases. This is a notable increase from previous years. AAC immediately reached out to the University of Wisconsin (UW) who is considered a national expert in shelter disease management and mitigation. The AAC experienced a similar situation in 2011 and 2018. At that time, disease control protocols were developed and established with Austin Pets Alive! (APA!). These protocols were recently reviewed by UW, and the AAC medical team continues to have frequent calls with them to receive advice regarding suggested adjustments to protocol as necessary.

Canine distemper is a virus that affects dogs, ferrets, and wildlife such as raccoons, coyotes, and foxes. It is normal to see a few cases each year, however, distemper has been an increasing problem across Texas this year. Because of the extreme heat, wildlife comes into populated areas looking for water sources. This includes public spaces and backyards. Distemper is contagious to other dogs and spreads similarly to how a cold spreads through humans: through saliva and mucus. Dogs can contract the disease when an infected animal sneezes or coughs near/on them, through nose-to-nose contact, and sometimes through

shared surfaces like water bowls or toys. Because of this, the AAC recommends removing outside water bowls that could be unintentionally shared with other animals.

The virus can impact all systems in the body and typically starts with upper respiratory signs that can occasionally progress to neurological symptoms. Educational flyers are being distributed to the community with the information above, and additional advice for owners regarding protecting their dogs from the virus.

While intake at AAC is currently limited, the shelter continues to accept dogs with medical injuries, illnesses, dogs abandoned at the emergency clinic, rabies quarantine cases, cruelty cases, and dogs in public emergencies such as owner death and eviction. AAC's protocol has been and continues to be to vaccinate all dogs upon arrival. Vaccines that are administered upon arrival include DHPP-Distemper/Parvo, Rabies, and Bordetella. The distemper vaccine requires a three-day minimum incubation period to reach a protective level and does not cure dogs that contracted distemper prior to entering the shelter. All vaccines are updated yearly and preventative care including flea protection and heartworm prevention are given to dogs at the AAC. All animals in foster care and those that have been adopted have received these vaccinations and preventative care.

As advised by UW, on August 8 2023, AAC tested 58 dogs displaying symptoms and sent the samples to the UW for testing. The test results confirmed 18 positive cases.

Sick dogs and dogs suspected of having the virus are kept in the 500-kennel run separate from each other and from other dogs. When dogs are moved due to potential infection, a full disinfect of their old kennel occurs, taking at least half an hour. Access to the 500-kennel run is limited to staff who are trained to handle infectious disease. The Animal Care staff leads the effort in keeping the shelter clean, and is present every day from 6a.m. until at least 9p.m. All spaces in the shelter are cleaned on a continuous basis every day. The Animal Care staff assigned to cleaning in the 500-kennel run do not clean any other spaces to avoid potential spread.

Training provided to all volunteers upon their start date included disease protocol, and protocol for handling dogs in the 500-kennel run. Standard Operating Procedure documents are also on the home page of their volunteer account and can be referenced at any time. This training is done so that all AAC staff and volunteers are aware of protocols in the event of an infectious disease. Volunteers are welcome to ask staff for refreshers at any time.

After moving the dogs to the 500-kennel run, the current protocol is to contact APA! when a confirmed or presumptive case is identified and transfer the case to them. At this time, AAC is transferring dogs displaying severe symptoms to APA!. To date, APA! has pulled 15 dogs, of which three have developed severe symptoms. However, APA! has notified AAC that their distemper program is full. Because of this, AAC worked with APA! on a pilot boarding agreement for APA to take up to 30 healthy, available dogs for an agreed upon fee to help alleviate space issues at AAC. We want to thank APA! for their assistance. To date, APA has moved 15 healthy AAC dogs into their shelter or foster care. Additionally, AAC asked the community to help get 60 healthy dogs into foster or adoptive homes as soon as possible.

First-time fosters can visit the shelter any day from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. to sign up and bring a dog home. Finally, AAC hired APA! to provide and administer Vitamin C infusions to 44 dogs housed at AAC. This was completed on August 21, 2023.

ASO thanks APA! for being a partner in this effort, and taking 15 dogs with distemper, and 15 additional healthy dogs per the established boarding agreement.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at 512-978-0521.

Cc: Jesús Garza, Interim City Manager