



media *release*

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**DOG OWNERS WARNED TO STAY ALERT AS CASES OF
MYSTERY DOG ILLNESS EXPECTED TO REOCCUR**
Animal Health Trust continues 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.

Seasonal Canine Illness (SCI) claimed the lives of several dogs during autumn 2009, 2010 and 2011, and scientists from the Animal Health Trust (AHT) expect cases to reoccur from late August 2012.

The illness which comes on very quickly, usually with 24 to 72 hours of dogs walking in woodland in autumn, causes vomiting, diarrhoea and lethargy. These clinical signs are common and non-specific, but 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.

Dr Richard Newton, of the AHT, said: "Our SCI investigation has been ongoing since we were first alerted to the illness in the autumn of 2010. Since then we have had more and more cases reported to us each autumn, but thankfully the number of dogs which are surviving has increased. We hope this is due to more owners being aware of the signs of SCI and accessing veterinary help as soon as possible."

Thanks to funding from The Kennel Club, the AHT has been able to step up its SCI investigation in 2012 and employ a dedicated SCI investigator. With the help of dog owners, the AHT hopes to get closer to pinpointing the cause of SCI during 2012.

Richard Newton added: "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 but information gleaned in 2011 has helped us to narrow this search area."

The AHT's investigation continues at five previously-affected sites across the UK:

- Clumber Park, Nottinghamshire
- Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk
- Sandringham Estate, Norfolk
- Sherwood Forest*, Nottinghamshire
- Thetford Forest, Norfolk.

As part of its investigation the AHT has visited one of the study sites, Sandringham Estate, with experts from the Natural History Museum and the Institute of Zoology. Both visits were designed to identify any changes in flora or fauna that could be occurring at this particular site in the run up to, and at the time of, cases occurring.

The AHT intends to call on the expertise of these organisations should cases of SCI reoccur in 2012. It is also calling on dog owners to continue to help with information.

Dog owners who have walked at any of the five sites are asked to complete an online questionnaire at www.aht.org.uk/sci

Dr Newton, said: "We desperately need information from dogs who 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."

Whilst the AHT's investigation focusses on five study sites, the veterinary charity is quick to highlight that dogs could be at risk of SCI walking in any woodland during autumn, so it advises dog owners to remain vigilant and seek veterinary advice immediately if they suspect their dog has SCI.

An information video about SCI is available to view at www.youtube.com/ahttv

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For further information, please contact:

Farrah Stevens, AHT press office, 01638 555602

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, Nottinghamshire and Suffolk and the AHT has been working with the Natural History Museum, the Institute of Zoology, 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
- *There have been no reported incidents of SCI at Sherwood Forest Country Park, Edwinstowe. Suspected cases of SCI have been reported in Nottinghamshire at Sherwood Pines, Clipstone and Blidworth Woods, Blidworth
- The AHT has produced an informative video about SCI which can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YYzgeyNxnw&list=UU0QyXayBwiIbj0HGlvzvcQw&index=2&feature=plcp> Please link to this video from any online media outlets so that dog owners can find out more.