



**FOREST
VETERINARY
CLINIC**

media release

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**INVESTIGATION INTO MYSTERY NEW FOREST DOG DEATHS
APPEALS FOR HELP FROM DOG OWNERS
Online questionnaire now available for dog owners to complete**

Dog walkers keen to help with the investigation into a recent spate of dog deaths in the New Forest, are being encouraged to complete an online questionnaire.

Developed by scientists at the Animal Health Trust (AHT) in Newmarket, Suffolk, the questionnaire is designed to support the ongoing investigation being undertaken by vets at Anderson Moores Veterinary Specialists and Forest Veterinary Clinic into the mystery illness which claimed the lives of a small number of dogs in the New Forest earlier in 2013.

The questionnaire is now available online at www.aht.org.uk. It should be completed by anyone who has walked their dog in Fordingbridge and the surrounding area since the beginning of 2013, even if their dog has not been affected.

Dogs affected with the illness initially presented with wounds or lesions on the limbs or face which would not heal after walking in the New Forest. The dogs then went on to develop signs of severe depression, loss of appetite, and vomiting, which were quickly accompanied by acute kidney failure, which is understood to have proved fatal in all but two cases to date.

The actual cause of the acute kidney failure, and its link to the initial wounds, is a mystery. This forms the focus of the current investigation which is being led by Anderson Moores Veterinary Specialists in Winchester in collaboration with Forest Veterinary Clinic in Fordingbridge - the area which has been most affected. Lynwood Vets is also closely involved with the investigation, as it has seen a number of cases.

The practices involved are continuing to work hard to identify the cause of this cluster of cases. Several tests have been conducted for harmful toxins present in the affected dogs which may have caused the kidney failure, but so far these tests have all been negative. Vets involved with the investigation are aware of one other suspected case from a different area of the New Forest.

David Walker, Head of Internal Medicine at Anderson Moores Veterinary Specialists, who is leading the investigation, said: "We are working with a number of veterinary and medical colleagues in the UK and the US to try and identify the cause of this concerning cluster of cases as quickly as we can. Pet owners should seek veterinary attention if they identify a wound on their dog's legs or face after walking in the New Forest. "

The AHT, a veterinary charity based in Suffolk, has a team of experts experienced in this type of scientific investigation. It was approached for advice on tackling the investigation by Anderson Moores Veterinary Specialists, after they became aware of six dogs presenting with acute kidney failure after being walked in the New Forest.

The AHT has been investigating another mystery dog illness, seasonal canine illness (known as SCI) since 2010, and has offered expert assistance to Anderson Moores Veterinary Specialists from its already established SCI resources.

Scientists from the AHT have produced the questionnaire and map which, with help from dog walkers, will provide essential data to assist with the current investigation. It is important for dog walkers in the area to complete this questionnaire, even if their dog hasn't been affected.

Richard Newton, Head of Disease Surveillance and Epidemiology at the AHT, said: "Input from dog walkers is essential to progress the investigation, even if their dog

wasn't affected. The questionnaire will provide vital information to help in identifying areas of highest risk, and possibly factors that contribute to the condition in this area of the New Forest.

"We hope to be able to assist Anderson Moores Veterinary Specialists with its investigation which is currently focussing on conducting toxicology tests and, together, hopefully we can narrow down the possible cause of this mysterious illness and help prevent further dog deaths."

It is important for dog owners walking their pets in the New Forest to be vigilant and if dogs develop clinical signs, to seek veterinary advice immediately.

If you are a dog owner and have any concerns or questions, please direct your enquiries to Forest Veterinary Clinic on 01425 652221 or by emailing: forestvetfb@btconnect.com. If you are a vet, please direct your enquiries to Anderson Moores Veterinary Specialists on 01962 76792 or by emailing info@andersonmoores.com.

Information about the New Forest and any associated dog deaths or illnesses can be found at www.forestry.gov.uk/newforest .

A hard copy of the New Forest questionnaire can be provided by emailing info@aht.org.uk.

Ends

For further information, please contact:

Katherine Lawson , AHT press office, 01638 751000 ext 1572

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

- The AHT was asked by Anderson Moores Veterinary Specialists www.andersonmoores.com to provide epidemiological support for its investigation into the mystery illness
- The AHT advises any dog owner who is concerned about their dog's health, to contact their vet immediately
- The AHT have been investigating SCI since 2010. SCI is an illness which affects dogs during autumn, after they have been walked in woodland areas.
- A very small proportion of dogs are affected, but in some cases SCI has proved fatal. The clinical signs are acute vomiting, diarrhoea and lethargy within 24 to 72 hours of being walked in woodlands
- The cause of SCI is not known. The current investigation is focussing on harvest mites, and the possibility that they are acting as a vector for an as yet unidentified pathogen.