



media release

Monday 28 November 2011

UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF SEASONAL CANINE ILLNESS INVESTIGATION AHT briefings bring vets and professionals up-to-speed with SCI investigation

A veterinary charity investigating Seasonal Canine Illness (SCI) has held two briefing events for vets and stakeholders being affected by the condition.

Scientists and clinicians from the Suffolk-based Animal Health Trust (AHT) travelled to Norfolk and Nottinghamshire to update professionals on the progress of its investigation.

More than 50 veterinary professionals and stakeholders attended the briefings which were held on Monday 31 October and Wednesday 2 November.

Dr Richard Newton, of the AHT, who is leading the SCI investigation, said: "We are hopefully coming towards the end of the second autumn in which we have been investigating SCI, with fewer cases being reported to us in the past few weeks. We have managed to collect a lot of information from vets and also from dog owners since we became aware of the recurrence of SCI at the beginning of September 2011."

"These briefings were designed to let those professionals closest to the investigation know what progress we've made and in what areas we still need their help."

In September scientists from the AHT visited specific, SCI-affected areas on the Sandringham Estate, one of its SCI investigation sites, with British field botanist, Dr Mark Spencer, from the Natural History Museum.

Dr Spencer stated that there was no obvious evidence of any plants, fungi, blue-green algae or bracken spore toxins, which have been proposed as causes, which would cause the clinical signs of SCI in dogs through direct contact.

Dr. Newton added: "Mark was confident that there was nothing obviously unusual in the woodlands and that the plants and habitats he observed did not provide evidence of abundant and recently emerged botanical or fungal species that would explain the recent autumnal re-emergence of SCI at the Sandringham Estate".

"Because of this we have been looking at other possible causes. Information made available to us in 2011 suggests there may be links between SCI and harvest mites, and to a lesser extent links between SCI and wood pigeons, and perhaps other bird species. We have been working with experts in the necessary fields, in the UK and internationally, to follow up these lines of enquiry."

The AHT is continuing its investigation based at five sites – Sandringham Estate and Thetford Forest in Norfolk, Clumber Park and Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire, and Rendlesham Forest in Suffolk.

It is still requesting that owners who have walked their dogs at any of the five study sites since the beginning of August 2011 complete the relevant questionnaire on the AHT website, regardless of whether dogs became ill. Getting information from non-affected animals is just as important to the investigation as that provided for sick dogs.

The charity expects that the number of cases will start to rapidly decline in the next few weeks, as they did at this time in 2010.

Dr. Newton, said: "We expect to see fewer cases from now until next autumn but dog owners should still stay vigilant. We did have several cases reported to us in December 2010 so we may not have seen the end of SCI in 2011 just yet."

Ends

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 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.