

Seasonal Canine Illness



You may have heard or read information about mystery illnesses affecting our dogs, Seasonal Canine Illness (SCI) is one of these and we thought we would do an article on it to help make things clearer.

However we soon found when researching it is that although there have been many studies and theories no one really knows what causes it so making things clearer probably wouldn't be possible.

It is normally characterised by **vomiting**, which may be accompanied by **diarrhoea** and **lethargy** and these clinical signs are usually witnessed within three days of having roamed in a woodland area. Unfortunately, in some cases,

SCI becomes severe very quickly and sadly some dogs do not survive.

Cases have been reported all over the UK since 2009 and are generally seen from August to November.

SCI can affect dogs of any size, shape or sex; however a study by the Animal Health Trust found that smaller dogs may be more likely to be affected and studies found that dogs are also more likely to get the disease if they are new to the woodland area (dogs on holiday or day trips etc) and also more likely if allowed of lead. It is thought that this is why more touristy areas (Clumber Park, Sandringham, Sherwood Forest etc) get higher numbers of cases. Its **not** because there is more danger there than any other woodland but because more dogs from out of area visit these places.. Having said all this we know of a recent case of a Labrador falling ill after walking in Woodland he visited regularly so there are exceptions to the findings.

The only thing owners and vets regularly see on affected dogs are harvest mites (known as 'chiggers', which are orange in colour). However, it is currently unknown whether these mites are involved in the transmission of the disease or whether they just happen to be abundant at a time of the year when the disease strikes.

As the (infectious, or 'toxic') cause of SCI is unknown there is currently no specific treatment for the disease, but vets can try to alleviate the signs of SCI. As dogs will lose a lot of fluid with their gastrointestinal upset, it is often important to hospitalise them and rehydrate them on a 'drip'.

Dogs will often be feverish and, as bacteria may be involved, vets may prescribe antibiotics. Most vets in affected areas have become familiar with the disease over the years and therefore normally take swift action. If dogs get veterinary treatment rapidly, most will make a full recovery from SCI

What advice is there for dog owners?

- **Be vigilant**
Closely monitor your dog's health in the hours and days after a woodland walk, especially if you normally do not walk your dog(s) in the area
- **Use a lead**
Keep your dog on a lead during a woodland walk so that you can keep an eye on them at all times
- **Don't hesitate**
Go to your vet immediately if you think your dog could have SCI - prompt veterinary attention could make the difference between life and death. If dogs get veterinary treatment quickly, they tend to recover well after a week or so.
- **Keep hydrated**
Make sure your dog is offered water before you set off on foot, especially if you have travelled a long way in the car for your walk. Keeping hydrated may help if your dog is affected by SCI.
- **Think about mites**
Harvest mites have been commonly noted on dogs suffering from SCI, so it may help to preventatively spray dogs against mites before a walk. It is important to use a spray rather than a 'spot-on' product as the chemical barrier of a spray may be more effective at preventing a mite infestation and can be applied directly to the more exposed areas of the feet, legs, chest and belly. Your vet will be able to advise on the correct products.
- **Tell others**
Help to raise awareness of the disease amongst fellow dog owners so if their dog falls ill they know to seek immediate veterinary help.

