

Vaccinate for parvovirus, vets urge dog owners

By Miranda Burski
Saskatoon newsroom

Veterinarians say they've been treating more parvovirus cases than usual this season.

The canine disease has been making dogs sick for approximately 30 years, and Dr. Alain Fafard, a veterinarian at Furry Friends Animal Hospital in Saskatoon, said it isn't unusual to see an occasional spike in cases.

"It sort of waxes and wanes," he said.

"There'll be times when it isn't that rampant, and then other times, like right now, we seem to be seeing an increase in the number of cases we're seeing."

Fafard said the high number of urban cases is probably due to either an increase in the dog population or a decrease in the number of vaccinations.

Rural veterinarians note a similar rise in cases.

Dr. Roy Lewis, a veterinarian at the Westlock Veterinary Centre in Westlock, Alta., attributes it to the number of unvaccinated dogs that run free in the area.

"The minute you get a bunch of nonvaccinated dogs running around, it becomes more common," he said.

Pet owners in rural areas may be less likely to vaccinate their dogs than those in urban areas, he added.

Parvovirus is a contagious disease transmitted through the fecal-oral route. It is picked up when a dog eats or licks the feces of an infected dog, either off the ground or on a dog's fur.

Vaccination is the easiest way to prevent the spread of the virus.

"It's a disease that's way easier to prevent rather than treat," Fafard said.

Parvovirus vaccinations begin when a puppy is six to eight weeks old.

The puppy receives a second shot at approximately 12 weeks and a third at approximately 16 weeks.

Clinics will then administer a shot either annually or every three years.

Lewis said most dogs that receive the vaccination never develop the disease.

"We get the odd dog with it in spite of the vaccination, but that's relatively rare."

Symptoms of parvovirus include profuse vomiting and diarrhea, depression, lack of appetite and difficulty walking or standing.

Can be fatal

It is important that dogs with these symptoms receive treatment as soon as possible. The virus causes severe gastro-intestinal disease, which could lead to dehydration and death.

"It's quite often fatal, especially if left untreated," Fafard said.

"And sometimes, despite the most aggressive treatments, it's still fatal."

Lewis agreed that the virus generally kills the dog if left untreated, but said treatment can make a difference.

"We've had at least a 95 percent survival rate with treatment."

He said Rottweilers and Dobermans have the most difficulty with the disease.

"Large breed dogs, if they get it, seem to get it the worst."

Fafard and Lewis urge owners to make sure their puppies are vaccinated and to take their dogs to see a veterinarian if symptoms appear.

"It's a disease that's way easier to prevent rather than treat."

— Alain Fafard, veterinarian



COOKIE MONSTER — Laura Olive uses her Pathfinder scarf to tie together the two Girl Guide cookie boxes worn by Rylea Lunde outside a grocery store in Sylvan Lake, Alta. The 12-year-old Pathfinders were drawing attention to the sale, one of two major annual Girl Guide fundraisers, the other being sandwich cookie sales each spring. (Randy Fiedler photo)



David Matthews photographs signs, buildings and other features in the landscape to form letters. He says the hardest letter to find is a capital R.

(Andrea Geary photo)

Letters captured in landscape

By Andrea Geary
Freelance writer

WINNIPEG — Take a good look at the next telephone pole you pass. Does it look like a giant letter T? Or does that forked tree resemble a Y?

Photographer David Matthews sees upper and lowercase letters of the alphabet everywhere he goes.

"I keep my eyes open and have my camera with me at all times."

David runs his business, A to Z Illusions, from his home in Alexander, Man., a village west of Brandon. He calls his work letter art photography or lettergraph. A photo of a door in the shape of an H is one of the approximately 400 photos he has in stock that contain the shape of a letter.

Matthews uses these images to spell words. An automatic function on his website at www.atozillusions.com allows visitors to select letters to spell words of their choice. They can check on variations of each letter in their word to personalize the overall look.

"I'm giving them the paint box and they are painting the picture."

He said L-O-V-E is the most popular word, followed by L-A-U-G-H and F-A-M-I-L-Y. Customers often order words as gifts for a new baby, wedding, birthday or retirement.

Matthews processes his photos in a four by six inch format in sepia tone because he said colour distracts from the letter shapes and he finds black and white too harsh.

The letters are available individually, or Matthews will mat and frame a word that a customer selects.

Growing up in England, Matthews began photography as a hobby and later learned the skill of developing photos commercially.

He worked as a photojournalist, took commercial photos and ran a camera shop before marrying a Canadian and moving to Thompson, Man., in 1999. He and his wife have been living in Alexander for about six years.

Matthews said he began to see years ago how natural and manmade shapes can form letters. However, it was the literacy work he

does as a volunteer in the local elementary school that inspired him to start taking photos of these images and forming words.

Older buildings often contain interesting shapes, and Matthews is now working on a collection of letters with an agricultural theme.

Matthews is working on a collection of letters with an agricultural theme.

All but three of the letter photos he offers were taken within Manitoba. One of them is Toronto's CN Tower, which looks like a capital I. The hardest letter to find is a capital R.

While Matthews conducts most of his business through his website, he also sells his work at craft sales in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

This past summer, he set up a booth at the Forks Market in Winnipeg, where international visitors were interested in his photos.

On his website, visitors can sign up for a newsletter that includes information on Matthews upcoming shows and tips on photography.

THE Western Producer

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