

WORRYING PARVO INCREASE TIP OF ICEBERG, SAYS PDSA

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report by
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A LEADING veterinary charity has seen a 34 per cent leap in suspected canine parvovirus cases in 2013, with vets worried reported cases are just "the tip of the iceberg".

Following a spate of outbreaks across the UK – including Stoke-on-Trent, Gillingham, Liverpool and Newcastle – PDSA has collated year-on-year figures for suspected parvovirus cases, taken from the numbers of patients presenting with gastroenteritis and gastrointestinal haemorrhaging.

In the first six months of 2013, PDSA's 51 hospitals treated nearly 1,754 suspected cases, compared with 1,313 in the first six months of 2012.

The charity is now calling on all practices to remind clients to vaccinate their dogs, as well as

communicating the importance of getting suspected parvovirus cases seen as soon as possible.

Inundated

Duncan Senior is a vet at the organisation's Stoke hospital, and has been battling with parvovirus cases all summer.

"Since July it has been continuous – there have been times when we've been inundated – where we've had five in a day and the isolation area has been packed to the gunnels, so we've had to use flat-packed cases at the far end of the practice so we could try to do effective barrier nurs-

ing," he told *Veterinary Times*.

In July and August the Stoke hospital saw 39 confirmed parvovirus cases, and 100 cases of dogs with gastrointestinal haemorrhaging. Mr Senior added: "What I've seen recently is an unprecedented outbreak – the only people here at Stoke who have seen worse are those who have been here for two decades, from before we were doing vaccinations.

"I worry we're still only touching the tip of the iceberg when it comes to unvaccinated dogs. When we're seeing these preventable conditions and pets dying so needlessly, it's such a pity. This just shouldn't be happening."

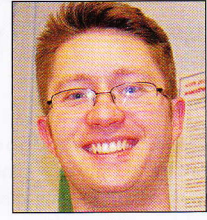
Vaccination

The charity's 2012 *Animal Well-being Report* found 28 per cent of dogs have never been vaccinated or have lapsed boosters, with 30 per cent of owners saying vaccination was "not necessary" for their pet, and 11 per cent believing vaccines were "too expensive".

Mr Senior admitted the best form of owner education was word of mouth following an outbreak, which has now

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started to boost vaccination rates in his area. However, he urged veterinary colleagues to keep up communication with clients about the importance of vaccination.

"If parvo is not on your doorstep, you're not going to pay that much attention to it, but it is up to us in the profession to keep working at raising awareness of these diseases and vaccination," he said.

"It's amazing how much more of a passionate conversation you have with clients about it when you've just seen a puppy die from parvo or had to put one to sleep.

"Clients don't see conditions like this day in day out, as we might, and we can't shy away from having good honest face-to-face conversations with clients about it, as well as

using new media. If there was a 'magic bullet' to get across the message that would be great, but there isn't, so we have to keep at it."

Supporting PDSA's calls for an ongoing focus on vaccination, BSAVA president Michael Day said: "Canine parvovirus remains a lethal and prevalent infection among the UK dog population.

"Anecdotal reports suggest hot spots for disease outbreaks, and industry data suggests routine preventive health care for dogs and cats may have declined due to the global economic recession.

"The importance of vaccinating against this disease cannot be overemphasised, in particular, the protection of puppies by vaccinating in accordance with WSAVA vaccination guidelines."

