

## Alabama Rot in Dogs

Alabama rot has been very prominent in the press recently and is, quite rightly, a concern for dog owners in the Swindon area due to a number of local cases.

**What is Alabama Rot?** - The reason that this disease is called Alabama rot is that prior to 2013 the only reported cases had been in a group of greyhounds in Alabama in the '80s. The medical name for this condition is Cutaneous and Renal Glomerular Vasculopathy.

**What causes Alabama Rot?** – We don't know! No infectious or toxic causes have yet been identified. However, some elements of this disease mirror Haemorrhagic Uraemic Syndrome in people, which is triggered by a "shiga-toxin" released by specific E-coli bacteria.

### What are the symptoms?

- Skin disease
  - Lesions can vary in appearance; the most common lesion is a circular, ulcerated area usually on the lower part of the limb or sometimes around the muzzle
- Kidney failure
  - Not all dogs will go on to develop kidney failure, however, this is life-threatening for those that do
  - Symptoms often start with acute increased water intake and urination followed by loss of appetite, lethargy, sometimes vomiting
  - As kidney damage progresses the water intake and urination volumes can reverse and become abnormally low.
  - These symptoms can develop any time from 1-10 days following development of the skin lesions

**How is the disease confirmed?** - The appearance of the skin and even the acute kidney failure can be seen with other problems and so diagnosis is usually presumptive. Definitive diagnosis can be made from skin and kidney biopsies; however, this is usually only performed in those dogs who do not survive the disease as part of a post-mortem.

**What is the treatment?** Currently it is not clear whether early treatment of dogs with skin lesions alone will prevent the development of kidney failure. This is because not all dogs with skin lesions will progress to kidney failure even without treatment. Once kidney failure has developed there is a very high risk that the disease will be fatal. Management of acute kidney failure involves intensive care hospitalisation and on some occasions further referral to a hospital that can perform dialysis.

**Is my dog going to die if it develops a skin lesion?** We do not currently know the likelihood of developing life-threatening kidney failure in dogs that have skin lesions. Apart from those who are already showing kidney damage we are not able to predict whether your pet will be do so. If treatment is not an option (e.g. due to limited finances) many dogs may be ok if left untreated, however, this would not be our advice.

**What should I do if my dog develops a skin lesion?** If your dog develops an unexplained skin lesion we would advise that you make an appointment to see a vet for the same day. As described above the lesion itself is not diagnostic and therefore we would advise the following precautions can be taken if you wish:

- A blood sample could be taken to check your dog's kidney parameters. Even if your dog is not unwell this can be useful to use as a baseline to monitor the parameters over the following few days
- If suspicions are very high your dog could be admitted to the hospital for close observation, regular blood samples and supportive intravenous fluids. Again we do not know whether this will prevent dogs from progressing into kidney failure
- If your dog is unwell or blood tests suggest kidney disease we would advise that your dog is admitted immediately to the hospital for intensive supportive therapy and further assessment.

**How do I avoid my dog getting Alabama Rot?** As we do not know the cause we also cannot advise you on the best cause of action to avoid it. Evidence from previous cases would suggest that there are geographic "outbreaks" in areas such as the New Forest and, more recently, West Woods near Marlborough. This supports the likelihood either for infection or a toxin. However, given that there have only been a handful of confirmed cases from this area despite the large number of dogs walked here there may be other factors at work.

Avoidance of specific dog walking sites may or may not be appropriate and certainly measures such as washing mud off of dogs after a walk should not be considered protective. Although woodlands have been suggested to be high risk for contracting the disease avoidance of these areas again not a guarantee of prevention.

It is important that there is perspective on this condition. The frequency of this disease is currently very low nationally and even locally. The most important point is to maintain vigilance for unexpected skin lesions. Our animals need exercise and stimulation and it is not appropriate to stop walking your dog.

If in doubt, please contact us to discuss your concerns. However, we will always advise that you bring your dog in for an assessment.

Alabama rot is being researched and there may be changes made to advice as more is learned about this disease.



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