



Dog Owner Information Local Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever Surveillance in Dogs

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF) is a bacterial infection transmitted by ticks to people and dogs. Infected dogs do not pose a direct risk to people. Nevertheless, infected dogs may serve as a warning to people that ticks in the area are carrying the disease, and that people and other dogs are to be protected from ticks. Since March 2007, Veterinary Public Health has received reports of four dogs suspected of having RMSF. It is not certain that these dogs really had RMSF. There are other bacteria related to the agent of RMSF that can cause similar changes in blood tests, and that may potentially make dogs sick. Tracking RMSF cases in dogs can help Public Health determine if this disease present in Los Angeles County.

In dogs, RMSF symptoms range from mild to severe. There is no set of “typical” symptoms. Most dogs infected with RMSF show tiredness and a lowered appetite, but may also have cough, conjunctivitis, vomiting, diarrhea, red speckles on the gums, enlarged lymph nodes, painful joints, or swelling of the legs or face.

Local surveillance for RMSF and related bacteria in dogs

Los Angeles County Veterinary Public Health is asking LA County veterinarians to report suspected RMSF cases in dogs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the California Department of Public Health are both assisting Los Angeles County Veterinary Public Health with this surveillance.

Testing of blood, ticks, and fleas from ill dogs is being offered to determine whether cases of RMSF are truly occurring here in dogs. This testing program is anticipated to last approximately 12 months.

Participation in Testing Program

- We would like to thank you in advance for your dog’s participation in this program. The information gathered from your dog’s case will be used to better track and understand RMSF, and therefore will help other dogs and people.
- Your veterinarian may discuss participating in this program if:
 1. Your dog has a recent history of tick exposure, and
 2. a fever, and
 3. a low platelet count (type of blood clotting particle measured on blood tests), and
 4. your dog has been sick for a fairly short time.
- Your veterinarian will draw a little extra blood, and collect ticks and possibly fleas. The first samples must be collected early in a dog’s illness in order to be useful for this program.
- Your veterinarian will discuss drawing a second blood sample in 2-3 weeks to track the illness. This follow-up sample is very important to track your dog’s immune response to RMSF.
- The tests will be performed in batches, and may not be available for 2-4 weeks. **Please do not wait for results before treating your sick dog.** Your veterinarian will likely need to run other, faster tests to determine what treatment is to be given.
- Our office will report all results to your veterinarian as soon as they are available.

