

Alabama rot

The first confirmed case of 'Alabama rot' in the UK was in 2012. At the time of writing there have been less than 150 cases confirmed, and they have been from all over England and Wales, with a couple of cases in Southern Scotland, Northern Ireland and Eire, see: <http://www.vets4pets.com/stop-alabama-rot/>.

The veterinary name for this disease is 'idiopathic cutaneous and renal glomerular vasculopathy' (CRGV). This mouthful describes – to vets! – what actually happens; for unknown reason, the walls of blood vessels in the skin and in the glomeruli (part of the kidneys) become damaged resulting in blood clots that cut off the local blood supply, causing the affected tissue to die, resulting in skin lesions and kidney failure. The disease is known as Alabama rot because it is very similar to a disease that occurred in the USA about 30 years ago – although that disease affected only greyhounds, whereas the current UK outbreak appears to affect any breed. In the UK it was initially known as 'New Forest disease' because it was first recognised in the New Forest area, although in fact cases occur all over the UK.

The disease starts as skin lesions that look like erosions or ulcers, usually on the face or lower legs, but sometimes elsewhere including in the mouth. The skin lesions themselves are not particularly serious, and not all dogs who get the skin lesions go on to develop kidney failure. However, some do develop severe kidney failure over the next two to seven days, with obvious signs of serious illness including being off food, vomiting and lethargy. Despite on-going research, the cause of the disease is not known, so we do not know how to prevent it and have no specific treatment for it. Unfortunately, the outlook for confirmed cases is poor – with aggressive supportive care about 20% of cases with severe acute kidney failure have survived.

All this sounds alarming but, in fact, the disease is extremely rare; less than 150 cases have been identified over 5-6 years, out of far more than 10 million dogs in the UK over that time. The cases mostly occur in the winter period, November to April. As mentioned, the first signs are unexplained skin lesions, but those lesions can look like bites, sores or minor wounds, and the vast majority of unexplained skin lesions will not be the start of this disease. Most cases of acute kidney failure will also have another cause. So, our advice is, if you see unexplained, unusual skin lesions on your dog, particularly on the face or lower legs, do get your vet to check them as soon as possible, but because the disease is so uncommon, do not worry about it otherwise. Other well-recognised diseases are actually more likely to cause serious illness or death – they are just not 'in the news' because they are not new.

For more about Alabama rot see: <http://www.vets4pets.com/stop-alabama-rot/> & <https://www.andersonmoores.com/owner/CRGV.php>.

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