



Your complete guide to natural dog care and training

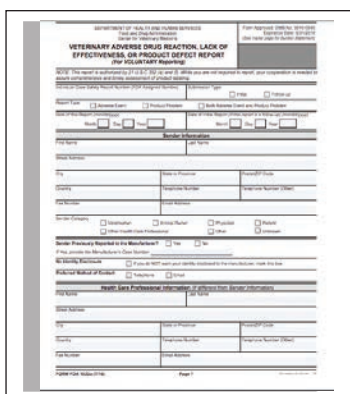
Whole Dog Journal™



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WholeDogJournal**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Nancy Kerns

TRAINING EDITOR

Pat Miller

PUBLISHER

Timothy H. Cole

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR

Greg King

EDITORIAL OFFICE

WDJEditor@gmail.com

4006 Hildale Avenue

Oroville, CA 95966

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

(800) 829-9165

WholeDogJournal.com/cs

PO Box 8535

Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535

CANADA: Box 7820 STN Main

London, Ontario N5Y 5W1

REPRINTS

For price quote, contact

Jennifer Jimolka at (203) 857-3144

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NEWSSTAND

Jocelyn Donnellon, (203) 857-3100

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Price of Freedom

To me, the joys of off-leash hikes are worth any amount of training maintenance.

I asked trainer and WDJ's Training Editor Pat Miller to write about the risks and responsibilities of off-leash dog walks in this issue (see page 6). That's because I'm a huge fan of hiking with my dogs off-leash, but I recognize that the activity is a huge challenge for many dog owners.

I hike with my dogs off-leash a couple times a week. I am supremely lucky to live nearby a "wildlife area" where it's legal for dogs to be off-leash for much of the year (not during the bird nesting season, however). It has wide-open views, offers several areas where dogs can drink and swim in safe, clean water, and best of all, I hardly ever see anyone else out there!

But it's not without hazards. The area is home to *lots* of rattlesnakes, and we see them frequently in the late summer and early fall. There is a shooting range nearby, and hunting is allowed in various seasons; some dogs (not mine) are frightened by the sound of gunfire and may spook. There are always birds on the various bodies of water we walk around; dogs who chase waterfowl might take off and never be seen again! And the boundary fence line we sometimes walk along is just barbed wire and cattle graze on the other side; a naïve town-dog who decides to crawl under the fence in hopes of a fun chase risks getting stomped by the range-smart mama cows, who defend their calves from coyotes year after year.

To me, the benefits of off-leash walks in this area are worth the risks – but I also work *hard* to make sure my dogs have razor-sharp recalls, that they respond to "OFF!" by halting or turning away from whatever has piqued their interest, and that they will sit down immediately on cue and stay put until I release them with another cue. We practice each of these behaviors *every single time* we walk out there, and I bring high-value treats (and Woody's favorite squeak ball) to reward them richly for their cooperation.

It's not for everyone. I have friends who are put off by the snakes, others whose dogs are so overstimulated by the water birds that they cannot be let off-leash, and one whose dog comes unglued when she hears gunfire. That's all fine with me; my dogs and I are fine with being alone in our (practically private) park.

CORRECTION

I inadvertently left Solid Gold off the list of our approved dry dog foods in last month's issue. It was an oversight and absolutely no reflection on any lapse on the part of the company. We have added their company and product information to the online version of the February issue and will include this information in the April issue, along with some other notes and discussion about the dry food review.



NK



Dogs' Knees' Needs

Cranial cruciate ligament tears are very common in dogs. Learn how these injuries happen, and what you can do to try to prevent them.

Many dogs are amazing athletes, capable of running faster, jumping higher, and displaying better endurance than most human sports stars. But even when they are *not* very athletic, dogs are hard on their joints, particularly their stifle joints. The dog's stifle is analogous to a human knee and is commonly (and interchangeably) called a knee or a stifle.

One of the most common athletic injuries in humans is damage to the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in the knee. If they haven't torn it themselves, most people know someone who has. In human athletes, this is known as the "plant and twist" injury. It's seen most frequently when the foot is planted firmly and the knee is then either twisted or run into (picture those cringe-worthy clips of soccer and football players being hit from the side).

In dogs, we see this same injury, often resulting from the same sort of forces, but we *also* see chronic wear and tear leading to cruciate ligament tears. To fully understand why this is so, you need to appreciate the mechanics that lead to cruciate ligament injuries.

CANINE KNEE ANATOMY

The knee joint in a dog is the point where the thigh bone (femur) and "calf bones" (tibia and fibula) come together and interact. Refer to Figure 1 (right) so you can fully understand what the dog's knee is up against, literally and figuratively! Here are the anatomical terms you'll need to know:

- **Femur** – Upper leg bone extending from the hip to the knee.
- **Tibia** – Primary lower leg bone extending from knee to ankle.
- **Fibula** – Secondary lower leg bone extending from knee to ankle.
- **Stifle** – Knee joint.

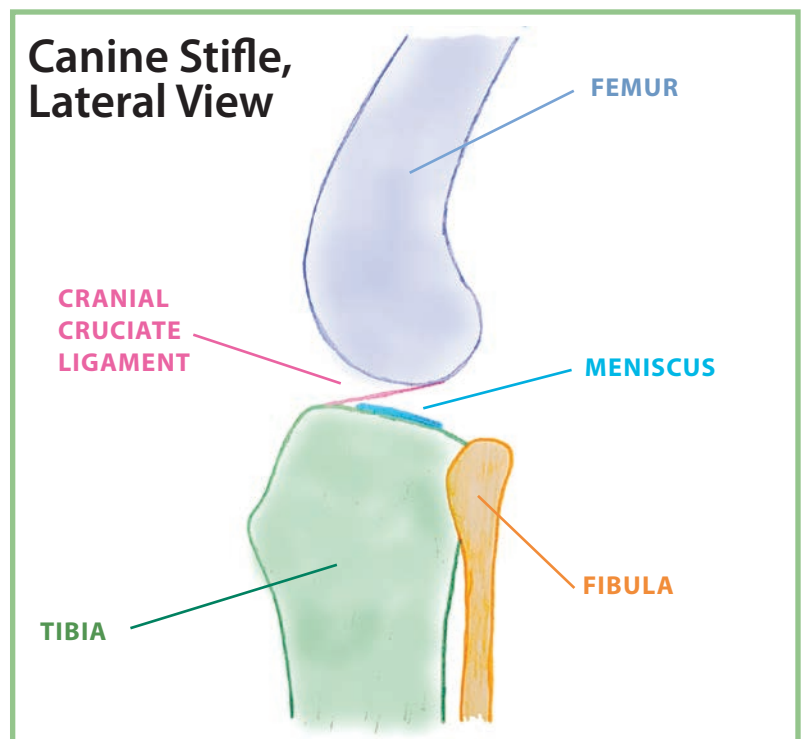
- **Cranial cruciate ligament (CrCL)** – This ligament provides front-to-back stability (and a tiny bit of rotational stability) between the femur and tibia in the knee joint.
- **Meniscus** – C-shaped cartilage cushion that provides shock absorption in a joint.

THE DIFFERENCE IN OUR KNEES

Picture your dog standing: His knee joints are slightly bent, ready to propel him forward like a coiled spring. Now picture yourself standing next to your dog: Your knees are straight, possibly even locked in place. The disparity in the posture of our knees when we are standing is one of the biggest differences between dogs and humans – and it contributes to the frequency of injuries to dogs' knees.

The bottom of the femur is rounded in both dogs and humans. The top of the tibia is flat. When a human is standing, that round

The cranial cruciate ligament prevents the tibia from moving forward in relation to the femur. When it tears, joint instability and pain (resulting in lameness) result. A veterinarian who suspects a tear of the CrCL will try to manipulate the joint and see if she can get the tibia to move forward; this is referred to as the "drawer test" (because if the CrCL is torn, the tibia will slide forward like the opening of a drawer.)



femur rests neutrally on a flat surface. It takes very little effort to keep that position – and gravity helps. A round structure on a flat surface will pretty much stay in place, as long as that flat surface is level.

Now, think back to the dog. His knee is bent. That means that the round end of the femur is on a tilted platform. Something needs to keep that femur in place.

That something is, in large part, the cranial cruciate ligament. As the name implies, the cruciate ligaments – both caudal (toward the tail) and cranial (toward the head) – form an “X” in the knee joint, holding the femur to the tibia. The cranial cruciate ligament starts at the back of the femur and attaches to the front of the tibia. It is constantly being strained by the natural position that the dog stands in. The slope to the top of the tibia, combined with the round end of the femur, means that the femur is always trying to fall off the back of the tibia.

STRING THEORY

A loose string can be moved around with little risk of breakage, but the more you increase the tension on the string, the easier it will tear. The same is true of a ligament. So, in dogs, with this ligament under constant



Dogs' knees are usually flexed; their cruciate ligaments are under tension when the dog is standing, holding the femur in place on the angled tibia. In contrast, our cruciate ligaments are in their least-stretched position when we are standing, as our femurs rest relatively securely on our tibias when we stand.

strain, tears are more common than in the human knee. In fact, this is the most common orthopedic injury that veterinarians see. In humans, this ligament gets periodic “rest” breaks and is really under strain only during physical activity. In dogs, it is in *constant* use – and over time, especially in large-breed or overweight dogs, it wears out.

A CrCL injury in a young, healthy dog is typically an athletic injury. In older dogs, it is usually an injury of chronic wear and tear. This explains

why it's so common for a dog who has damaged the CrCL on one side to then tear it on the other side. When you take one back leg out of commission, the work load shifts to the other, increasing the strain on the ligaments of the “good” leg.

This is simplifying things a bit. There are many contributing factors to this type of injury, from the dog's build (conformation) to his activity level. Some things that can predispose a dog to this type of injury include obesity, a sedentary lifestyle, and other joint problems (such as “trick” knee caps). Overweight dogs experience far more strain on their joints than their fit counterparts. Dogs who are not very active also strain their ligaments more, as their untuned muscles don't contribute much to the task of holding things in place.

A ligament by any other name . . .

The ligament that provides front-to-back stability in the knee is called the cranial cruciate ligament (CrCL) in the dog, but the same ligament in the human knee is called the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). Why the different anatomical names?

It has to do with how the front of a quadruped (four-legged animal) is described as compared to the front of a biped (two-legged animal).

In a quadruped, the “cranial” refers to the head end of the animal. The cranial side of the dog's knee is the side closest to his head.

In an upright biped like a human, the same surface of the knee (as just one example) can't accurately be described as being closest to his head. Instead, the “front” is called the anterior or ventral surface.

This can be confusing, especially when people refer to a dog's ACL. It's not the correct term, but when it's used, it is meant to indicate the CrCL.

To add to the confusion, the cranial cruciate ligament is sometimes abbreviated as CCL and sometimes as CrCL. Since CCL could also stand for caudal cruciate ligament, we prefer the more precise abbreviation of CrCL.

MOST COMMON VICTIMS

Let's look a bit deeper at the patients who most commonly present with this injury: small dogs, young big dogs, and old big dogs.

When a small-breed dog, young or old, is diagnosed with a torn cruciate ligament, it's very important to check for a specific, concurrent problem – medially luxating patellas. This is a fancy way of saying knee caps that slip to the inside of the joint. This is a very common congenital problem

for dogs under 20 lbs. When they are born with knee caps that move incorrectly, they are at higher risk for ligament tears because of the abnormal forces on the joint. This is important because it can and *should be* fixed at the same time as a torn cruciate ligament.

When a young large-breed dog is diagnosed with a torn cruciate, I look for conformation problems. Do his legs bow like a cowboy? Do his paws turn out like a duck? I also ask about activity level, since these are the dogs who will most commonly get this injury through athletic injury, just as with humans.

If it's an older, bigger dog, it's usually a wear-and-tear injury, which increases the risk for a tear in the other back leg.

All of these dogs have one thing in common, though: Their risk of a ligament tear is lower if they are fit and at an appropriate weight! Overweight dogs are at a much higher risk for joint problems in general, from arthritis and strains to fractures, dislocations, and ligament tears. Keeping your dog (young *or* old), active and at a healthy weight will stave off many potential problems.

DIAGNOSIS OF CRUCIATE LIGAMENT INJURIES

So now we know the anatomy and the “why” of this injury. Let's talk about how it's diagnosed. Any dog who comes in with a back leg limp should be checked for a torn cranial cruciate ligament.

The first clue is a knee joint that feels swollen. Anytime the knee joint is swollen I am on high alert for a ligament tear.

To look for this injury, veterinarians do something called a “drawer test,” which involves moving the tibia in relation to the

femur. If I can move the lower leg bone forward in the knee, the cranial cruciate ligament is not doing its job. Sometimes, in a big, strong dog, this requires sedation. But in small dogs, it's pretty easy to do during a routine physical exam.

Once this injury is *suspected*, x-rays are the next test. Now, let me say this and say it loud: **YOU CANNOT SEE A LIGAMENT ON AN X-RAY.** Nevertheless, x-rays are still *very* important, because they let us double-check for other injuries (such as small bone fragments) and help us evaluate whether arthritis might already exist.

The position of the leg bones (as seen in the x-rays) will also give us clues as to whether and how severely torn the cruciate ligament might be; certain changes in the position of the bones can indicate that the ligaments are not stabilizing the joint properly. Finally, x-rays also help with planning for how to treat the injury (which we'll talk about in the next issue).

COMPLICATING FACTOR

A torn meniscus is one concurrent injury that can be suspected, but not diagnosed, until surgery. This is another injury that's common to both human and canine knees.

The meniscus is a little piece of cartilage that provides cushioning and shock absorption in the knee. When the cruciate ligament is torn, that

cartilage starts getting squished and rubbed in an abnormal way, which can lead to tears in the meniscus. A chronically torn meniscus *may* lead to further arthritis and discomfort in the future. There is no good data on whether or not removing a torn meniscus improves long-term pain control in the joint. Some surgeons recommend removal and some do not, but that's a discussion to have on a dog-by-dog basis with your doctor.

FUTURE OPTIONS

The stifle is a complex joint with a lot of working parts. The joint is prone to injury because of the way it's formed and the way it's used in the dog. A cranial cruciate ligament tear is not an emergency, but it's worth a trip to your veterinarian to talk about options.

Cranial cruciate disease is a constellation of signs and symptoms that have a lot of different management options. We'll dig into those options in the next issue. Until then, keep an eye on your dog. I bet you'll notice a lot more of the dynamics of his knees than you did before! 🐾

A 2011 graduate of Michigan State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, Kyle Grusling, DVM, practiced emergency medicine for three years before switching to a general practice. Dr. Grusling works at Northland Animal Hospital in Rockford, Michigan.



Many tiny and small dogs have medially luxating patellas – kneecaps that can move out of position. If they tear a CrCL, the luxated patella should be surgically corrected at the same time the knee ligament is repaired.



Don't Unsnap Quite Yet

What you – and your dog! – should know before taking an off-leash walk or hike.

There is no doubt that it's immensely beneficial for dogs to be able to run off-leash. Most dogs cannot even come *close* to getting adequate exercise on the end of a leash, and lack of exercise contributes to a whole host of behavior challenges. And adequate exercise can be a huge factor in the success of behavior modification programs.

But taking a dog for a walk or hike off-leash must be done appropriately and legally in order to prevent any number of risks to the dog, other dogs, or humans who may encounter the off-leash dog, as well as livestock or wildlife in the area. Off-leash dogs may run off and get lost, run onto roads and cause serious accidents, cause hikers to fall and bicyclists to crash, and chase or even kill other animals.

Readers of WDJ will likely appreciate another hazard of off-leash dogs: The unfettered approach of an off-leash dog can trigger all sorts of behavioral issues in other dogs who are being walked on-leash. Service dogs, for example, should never have to be distracted by, much less defend themselves or their human partners against an incursion by an off-leash dog (whether its exuberantly friendly *or* attacking!). Dogs who are anxious about, terrified by, or even offensively

aggressive to other dogs and are being treated for these behaviors can suffer long-lasting or even permanent behavioral setbacks following even just one untimely, uncontrolled approach by a loose dog.

MANDATORY PREREQUISITES

We assume that you, as a caring, responsible dog owner, are as concerned about the safety and well being of other dogs as much as your own. Before you even *think* about taking your dog off-leash anywhere other than your own safely fenced yard, you should be able to accomplish the following prerequisites.

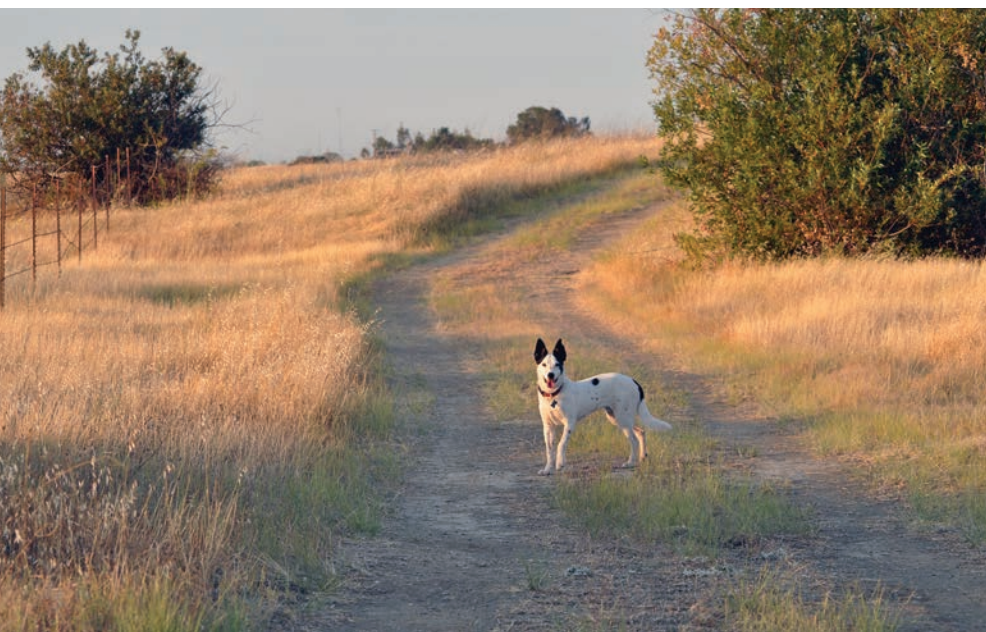
■ ■ **Know your own dog's personality and temperament well.** Your dog must be dog-friendly and human-friendly if you are going to take her off-leash anywhere. There is too much risk, and too much to lose, if your dog attacks another dog or bites a human.

■ ■ **Teach an excellent recall.** You must be able to call your dog back from *any* temptation – wildlife, small children, grannies with walkers, other dogs, etc. Even if she is dog-friendly, there may be other dogs who don't appreciate her attentions. And – heaven forbid she chases a cow or deer deep into the woods, never to be seen again. Note that in some places, it is legal for anyone to shoot a dog that is chasing livestock or wildlife.

For more information about teaching a fast, reliable recall, see WDJ's articles on this topic by three different trainer/authors in the September 2015, September 2014, and September 2012 issues.

■ ■ **Know and obey leash laws.** Regardless of how friendly and well-trained your dog is, you must obey local leash and control laws. The consequences of any incident that might occur are

This is the dream for many dog owners: off-leash dogs, enjoying an unrestrained romp while simultaneously keeping an eye on and an ear out for cues from their owners. This sort of responsiveness doesn't just happen, however; it has to be trained gradually and reinforced frequently!



greatly magnified if you're in violation of local animal control laws. Make sure your dog is currently licensed and wearing her tag!

■ ■ **Learn about the hazards in your potential off-leash hiking areas (and how to avoid or combat them) before you take off your dog's leash there!** We wouldn't suggest taking off your dog's leash in any place you hadn't been before, unless you are with another dog person who is familiar with all the potential hazards and can alert you to them ahead of time.

Before the leashes come off, you should know what, if any, potentially dangerous conditions are present in that location. A few of the possibilities include things such as:

- Venomous snakes
- Pond ice that your dog could fall through
- A spot along the beach where the ocean undertow is unusually strong
- Ponds that sometimes contain toxic algae
- Cliffs, caves, or abandoned mine shafts your dog could fall into or over
- Wildlife predators that could grab your dog
- A gap in a boundary fence near a busy road or highway.

If you are aware of these hazards, you can proactively prevent your dog from going near them, or respond quickly and effectively if a potentially dangerous encounter happens despite your best efforts.

THINGS TO TEACH YOUR DOG AND PRACTICE

It's not enough, however, to have a friendly and well-trained dog; you need to keep your dog's responses to your cues sharp and fresh. Here

NON-NEGOTIABLE NO-NO'S

There are a few canine behaviors that absolutely preclude off-leash options for your dog, other than your own safely fenced yard, including:

- *Strong, uncontrollable predatory behavior*
- *Strong, uncontrollable scent-tracking behavior*
- *Aggression toward other dogs or humans.*

Unless or until these behaviors are modified and you have trained a superbly reliable recall, you have no business having your dog off-leash anywhere in a public or private place where you might encounter/threaten the safety of others or of your own dog.

are things to practice regularly so she doesn't lose her edge:

■ ■ **Regular, automatic check-ins.** Your off-leash dog should stay fairly close to you, and frequently turn back toward you, or, better yet, return all the way to you – all *without being prompted to do so.*

Anytime you notice your dog turning toward you and/or looking at you, mark the moment with the click of a clicker or a verbal marker (such as the word "Yes!") and give or toss her a treat. The more frequently the checking-in behavior is reinforced, the more frequently your dog will offer it. This valuable behavior should be kept fresh with frequent reinforcement, whether that means treats, a quick game with your dog's favorite toy, verbal praise, and/or petting.

On the trail, you can encourage your dog to stay close to you and keep glancing back toward you by paying *close* attention to her and marking/reinforcing her check-ins.

Another game you can play to encourage your dog to keep an eye on you is to occasionally step behind a tree or duck behind a boulder on the trail; when she glances back and doesn't see you, she will likely turn and run back toward you to locate you. Don't make it difficult to find you; you don't want her to race past you in a panic! Instead, as you hear her approach, you can step out of hiding and throw an enthusiastic reward party! Note that this should

be a fun game, not something that makes her anxious. Skip this game if your dog suffers from separation anxiety or gets panicky if you step out of her sight.

You can also do unannounced U-turns and playful changes of pace – breaking into a jog or even taking off in a little sprint. Most dogs will respond to these behaviors by speeding to find or catch up with you. When your dog does this, reinforce her well with high-value treats and/or preferred play.

■ ■ **Emergency sits and downs.** These can sometimes work better than a recall in an emergency. Practice at a short distance (perhaps five or six paces away from you) and gradually cue her for these behaviors at greater and greater distances, until she will sit and/or drop to a down immediately on cue, even at a distance.

■ ■ **Reliable recalls.** A fast, reliable recall is worth its weight in gold. Practice, practice, practice. Reinforce, reinforce, reinforce. Use whatever your dog loves best in the world for off-leash recall rewards.

■ ■ **Walk Aways.** My new favorite! The Walk Away behavior can be used to cue your dog to quickly turn away from any potential hazard you (or she!) just noticed. When you want your dog to actively avoid going near something, you say "Walk away!" and move away with her,

feeding a jackpot of treats from your hand or tossing treats out in front of her. It's a fun and dynamic behavior – and because it's unlikely that it has been “poisoned” (associated with a potentially aversive result, making the dog speculative about the cue), it may work more effectively than a recall.

Here are some situations where Walk Away could be used:

- You see your water-loving dog running toward a pond that is covered with a dangerously thin sheet of ice. Say “Walk away!” and when she

swivels her head toward you, run away to encourage her to run after you, away from the pond. When she reaches you toss treats on the ground or feed from your hand and throw a happy party. Good dog!

- A horseback rider appears around a bend in the trail just 20 feet away. Your dog perks up and starts to move forward. You say “Walk away!” and when her head swivels toward you, step off the path and feed treats from your hand as she follows you. If necessary, continue to feed treats until the horse is well past.

For step-by-step instructions on teaching this behavior, see “How to Teach Your Dog to Just Walk Away,” in the September 2018 issue.

In Case of Dog Attack...

I've heard a disturbing number of reports in recent months from clients who were walking their dogs on-leash in areas where dogs are legally required to be on-leash, when their dogs were attacked by loose dogs. In most cases, the attackers were either dogs who were walking off-leash with their humans or dogs who charged off of their own properties at passers-by. But sadly, I have also heard about these incidents happening in places where it is legal to have your dog off-leash – dog parks, for example, private fenced yards, playgroups, open space areas where dogs are allowed off-leash, and jurisdictions that don't have leash laws.

It pays to be armed and ready if you take your dog anywhere – on-leash or off – both to be able to prevent encounters as well as break up a fight if one occurs. Of course, prevention is the much-preferred option! These are all things you do before the other dog gets close enough to make contact:

1 BE AN ASSERTIVE ADVOCATE FOR YOUR DOG. If you see someone with an inappropriately off-leash dog headed your way, loudly (but not angrily) call out, “Please put your dog on a leash!” If you get the “It's okay, he's friendly” response, answer, “Mine's not!” (Even if she is.) This might work. And it might not. Be prepared.

2 USE A NOISE AVERSIVE. Potential noise aversives include a marine air horn, a loud whistle (my favorite is the Storm Whistle, available from stormwhistles.com), loud hand-clapping, or a variety of party-favor style noisemakers. With any of these, as with other suggested aversives, be sure to condition your dog to the sound first, so you don't scare her in the process.

3 USE A VISUAL AVERSIVE. A pop-open umbrella may effectively startle an approaching dog who is getting close (remember to condition your own dog to love the umbrella first!). A loud “Go home!” accompanied by an angry face and arm motions also might work for an unaccompanied dog who charges off his property.

4 BLOCK WITH A PHYSICAL BARRIER. You can block an approaching dog by stepping in front of yours, using your own body as a visual/physical barrier. Alternatively, you can teach your own dog a “get behind” cue so you can ask her to step behind you. Keep an eye out for natural barriers the two of you can get behind (or on!) – cars, trees, garbage cans, fences.

TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

When all else fails and the other dog is clearly going to make contact, all bets are off, and force-free/pain-free goes out the window. The following are products that you can use to deter an approaching dog (they are obviously never to be used on your own dog!), and that I would never recommend for any other purpose: SprayShield Animal Deterrent (citronella spray) may be effective, and the Pet Corrector shoots out compressed air while making a hissing noise. Carry a stout stick, and don't hesitate to use it if necessary.

JUST STARTING OUT?

Once you are certain that you and your dog possess the basic prerequisites for off-leash walking (you know your dog well, she has a reliable recall, you know the local leash laws, and you are aware of the potential hazards in your walking destination), and you are equally certain that she poses no danger to anyone else, you are ready to introduce her to off-leash hiking.

How you begin depends on your dog and her level of energy and excitement on the trail. Mature dogs and inexperienced puppies may be inclined to stay close to you regardless of their energy levels and can be let off-leash right away. In contrast, if you have an athletic eager beaver,



and her enthusiasm may carry her too far from you too quickly, begin the walk with her on-leash, at least until some until her raw energy has dissipated a bit. Reward her amply for checking in. Practice Walk Away a time or two.

When your dog has demonstrated that she's listening and responsive to you, quietly unsnap the leash and continue walking as before – rewarding her for checking in and occasionally practicing a recall or Walk Away.

Continue to pay close attention to how your dog responds to the environment and other people and animals. If she begins to get overstimulated, paying less attention to you and a little too much attention to those ducks in that nearby pond, take the next opportunity to reward her for checking in or coming to you, and cheerfully snap the leash back on for a little while.

Keep the on-leash experience very positive and let her off-leash again as soon as she has calmed down and is once again responsive to your cues; you don't want her to think that every time she comes back to you she might be put on leash for the rest of the walk. To that end, make sure every time you leash her you are happy, using a cheerful tone of voice, and delivering lots of reinforcement.

DO NOT DO THESE THINGS WITH OFF-LEASH DOGS

While there are a number of things that should be practiced at least once during every off-leash walk, there are also things that you *shouldn't* do while walking your dog off-leash.

■ **Focusing on your mobile phone.** Your dog is your first and primary responsibility. If you must answer your phone, keep the conversation short and keep your eyes on your dog at all times. No texting, no Googling, no game-playing.

■ **Socializing and failing to closely monitor your dog.** Your dog is your first and primary responsibility. Keep your eyes on your dog at all times,



Sample Leash Laws

Most state laws have some form of dog control laws that prohibit an owner from allowing a dog to “run at large.” In addition to state control laws, counties and local municipalities are also free to pass more restrictive leash law ordinances – and many do. Know your local laws – and obey them! Here are some examples:

State of Delaware: No dog shall be permitted to run at large at any time, unless the dog is accompanied by the owner or custodian and under the owner's or custodian's reasonable control and is licensed in accordance with county ordinances. (Note: This is a “control” law; the dog does not have to be leashed, but must be under the owner's/custodian's immediate control.)

Marin County, California: Dogs shall at all times be kept under the immediate control and direction of a competent, responsible person who is capable of controlling such an animal. Any dog which is not subject to such control and direction may be seized and impounded. (Again, this is a “control” law, it does not state that the dog has to be on a leash. However, most of the cities within Marin County have actual leash laws.)

Alachua County, Florida: A dog owner has a duty under Section 72.12 to maintain “physical control” of the dog when the dog is off the owner's property. “Off the owner's property” includes streets, parks, public property, and private property of others. Physical control means immediate and continuous control through the use of a leash or continuous control through the use of an enclosure. (This is an actual county-wide leash law.)

New York City: A person who owns or controls a dog may not allow it to be in any public place or in any open or unfenced field abutting a public place, unless the dog is effectively restrained by a leash or chain no more than six feet long. (This is a city leash law.)

You can find your local ordinances online on government websites, and/or ask your local animal control agency for a copy of local animal control laws.

even if you are chatting with other dog owners or hikers.

■ **Ignoring hazards.** Do not fail to take action to prevent a potentially dangerous encounter. If you see a bicyclist, horse, another dog, a frozen pond, or some other attraction in the distance, call your dog to you and keep her safely secured until the hazard has passed.

IT'S THE BEST!

There are few activities more rewarding and enjoyable for you and your dog than a long off-leash hike in the woods, up and down hills, through meadows, across beaches, and anywhere else that the two of you can enjoy the natural world at its best and your dog gets to just be a dog.

Conversely, there are few experiences more traumatic than *losing* your dog – either because she runs off, gets gravely injured, or is impounded after attacking someone else's dog. If you use common sense about whether, when, where, and how to allow your dog off-leash, and always remember that your dog is your first and primary responsibility when you are out and about with her, you should be able to enjoy her company for many outings to come. 🐾

Author Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, is WDJ's Training Editor. She lives in Fairplay, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center. Miller's newest book is Beware of the Dog: Positive Solutions for Aggressive Behavior in Dogs. See page 24 for contact and book purchasing details.

PRODUCT
REVIEW

Can I See Your Dog's ID?

There are countless options for keeping your dog safely identified and no legitimate reasons not to!



Cooper says, "Why wouldn't you have ID on your dog? That just doesn't make sense!" If you don't like tags, use a collar with your contact info sewn in! And always microchip, no matter what other ID you use.

Some years ago, I was driving along the main route to our home in rural upstate New York when I spied a small dark terrier, scurrying along the roadside. While I was overdue at home for some family get-together, I could not leave that little lost-looking guy behind. After quite a bit of effort and the emergency enlistment of my husband and his brother, we managed to use a blanket to scoop up the little dog and get him in my car.

Once we got home and he was safely indoors, the terrier was more relaxed and allowed me to pet him and give him a look. He had a collar and a rabies tag, but no other identification. The rabies tags in our state provide the vaccinating veterinarian's information, but the clinic was

closed for the weekend. So we hosted the little stranger for the weekend.

On Monday, I called the vet's office. To protect the owner, they would not provide me with any information but promised to try to reach the owner of the dog. It took a couple days, but finally we got a call from the owners; they were in Florida and the dog had been in the care of another family. He had traveled – either on his own paw power or with the assistance of someone who snagged him and let him go – many, many miles!

The point of this anecdote is to remind you, as I do my dog-training clients, that it is wise to make sure your dog is always wearing identification, with up-to-date contact information! Ideally, your dog's tags have enough information that anyone who might find your dog could contact you directly, 24/7, in the event that she darts out, gets lost on a hike, etc. There are many options for you to employ!

We use multiple forms of identification on our dogs. It's our nature to have backup systems in our home; we have a double-door system for our front door, which also is posted with a warning not to let our deaf dog out. Our dogs' collars carry the tags, and when we walk, we attach our dog-walking harness to the collar with a carabiner.

Our tags include the required New York state license (which provides only a registration number and the name of our town, but this could be a start for someone); a rabies vaccination tag (that vaccination is required in every state in the United States – we want people to know that our dog is not a health threat); and a standard identification tag with our contact information on it. I add another tag if I ever leave my dogs in the care of a pet sitter; the pet sitter's number is on that last tag to streamline recovery should my pups get separated from their caretakers.

TYPES OF TAGS

The tag that has my contact information on it is a metal tag that I got at PetSmart. It's inexpensive and *quick*. You may want to get a fancy artisan tag if you get a new dog, but in the meantime, go to a pet supply store that has a tag-engraving machine. It's super quick and fun! The tags are thin metal, and don't appear to be that durable, but I've found them to last a few years. This type of tag is handy to get when your dog will be staying somewhere away from home and you want the

The author's dogs wear a whole "charm bracelet" full of ID tags, a tag indicating the dog is microchipped, and a custom-made tag that informs a rescuer that the dog is deaf.



sitter's contact info on your dog.

Many pet supply stores sell custom designs, or you can go on [Etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com) and see the many well-crafted designs out there. Some of these are made out of fancier metals like brass or hard plastic. Custom-designed tags cost a bit more and may take a couple of weeks to receive. There are also a multitude of Internet name-tag companies and they often offer deals on repeat or multiple orders. I opted to add a fancy little brass tag to our little dog's "charm bracelet." The brass tag lets people know that our dog Helen of Troy is deaf.

Silidog sells silicone dog tags – soft, durable, non-fading tags that are engraved on both sides with your information and shipped to you for \$20 each.

A relatively new benefit of a AAA membership is a free dog tag and registration for your dog. This plastic tag sports the AAA logo, color scheme, and toll-free number. If someone finds your dog and calls the number on the tag, AAA will contact you and tell you how to reach the person with your dog. A benefit of this feature is that the tag does not display any of your personal information.

I just received a similar service through Embark, one of the DNA-testing companies. We bought the DNA kit to test our new dog, Petey. In the box was a very nice tag with his Embark registration number and a phone number. The registration number was affixed to the tag and does not appear integral to its structure so I'm not sure how long that will last – but it's a nice perk.

JINGLE HELL?

Personally, I like the jingling noise that all my dogs' tags make as the dogs walk around my house; it helps me know where they are! But some people find the

very aversive. No problem! There are any number of little pouches that can contain and mute your dog's tags.

I found a stylish leather wrap-around "tag bag" that fastens to a

dog's collar with both a little clip and hook-and-loop fabric. They are made and sold by [LongDogLeather](https://www.longdogleather.com) on [Etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com), \$11.

ThunderCover is a translucent silicone pouch that contains the tags. Made by ThunderWorks, the same company that makes the ThunderShirt, the pouches are available widely in stores and online. [Chewy.com](https://www.chewy.com) offers them for \$8.

TAG SWITCHING

For those of you, like me, who like to change your dog's collar frequently, there are companies that have designed clips that can host the tags and are easily removed to place them on different collars, such as the Rubit Dog Tag Clip from [Rubitclip.com](https://www.rubitclip.com) (\$8).

Personally, I use a key ring for attaching ID tags to my dogs' collars; they are much stronger than the little rings that often come with rabies or license tags and are easily found in any hardware store. Remember: Never attach your leash to the flimsy rings that come with tags – they are not strong enough and you could lose both your dog and your tags!

IDENTIFICATION COLLARS

Another means of identification for those who are tag-phobic is to get a

collar that has your pet's name and your phone number sewn into or printed on the collar. This eliminates the jangling tags (though I appreciate hearing that sound so I know where my dogs are in the house).

There are a number of companies that make these collars. Orvis sells eight different models, including collars with reflective stripes and martingale collars.

The most basic is the Personalized Adjustable Dog Collar, \$21 (buy from [orvis.com](https://www.orvis.com) or call 888-235-9763).



DogIDS.com offers a dozen or so more personalized options. I like their Waterproof Soft Grip ScruffTag Personalized Collar. It's made out of a very strong waterproof material (poly-coated nylon webbing) with a built-in stainless steel plate that is engraved with your dog's information for \$34. These collars are made to a specific length based on your dog's measurements. Note that they are made with a traditional stainless steel tang buckle; for an option



Life hack: Use a staple remover to open and hold the key ring apart, so you can slip more tags onto the ring, or to slip the ring onto or off of the collar of the day.





DogIDS.com
Waterproof
Soft Grip ScruffTag
Personalized
Collar

with a plastic side-release buckle (which offers a quick release in an emergency), get their Nylon ScruffTag Personalized Collar (\$29).

USE ANYTHING! BUT USE SOMETHING!

The collar and tag identification options are vast, so no excuses! Pick an option that suits you and your canine and will result in a speedy reunion lest you are inadvertently separated. 🐾

In addition to dog training, Helene Goldberger, Esq., PMCT, CPDT-KA practices environmental law in Albany, New York. She lives in the rural Helderbergs with her husband, APBT Helen of Troy, CGC, TT, ATD, and new family member Petey, a Boxer/Beagle/Lab-mix. Helene is working toward her canine massage certification at the Bancroft Massage School in Massachusetts.

Have a 'chip!

In addition to their tags, my dogs are also microchipped. A microchip is implanted under the dog's skin with a needle, usually above the shoulder blades. Most veterinarians, shelters, and rescues microchip dogs routinely.

A microchip not only identifies your dog even if he loses his collar, it can confirm his identity and your ownership if he's ever stolen.

There are a number of microchip registration companies to choose from, including Home Again, AKC Reunite, Petkey, and 24 PetWatch. Before the microchip was inserted in Petey, my veterinarian scanned the chip to make sure it was active. She said that it was rare but on occasion the chip may be a "dud." After the chip is implanted, the technician usually scans it again, to make sure it's still readable.

After the microchip is inserted, make sure that either the veterinarian, shelter, or you has registered the required information with the microchip company – then, it's up to you to keep the contact information on file with the microchip company up-to-date! There is nothing a shelter or rescue worker hates more than finding a dog with a microchip, but being unable to reach the registered owner due to out-of-date contact information.

Most of the microchip companies offer a plastic tag to go on your dog's collar that has the company's toll-free number on it. Some of the companies, including 24PetWatch, also print a unique ID number on the tag, so even if the person who finds your dog doesn't have access to a microchip scanner, they can still call the company and a representative will help connect them to the dog's owner.

Tags from some of the other companies have no unique ID number on them; instead, the tags simply indicate that the wearer is microchipped. The dog still needs to be scanned so the microchip number can be reported to the chip company.



Since the inception of the microchip, there have been many rumors that they can cause diseases like cancer. While the rice-sized chip can occasionally migrate, ending up somewhere down the dog's shoulder or leg, there is no scientific evidence to support significant harm. Depending on where you have your dog chipped, the fee for insertion and chip registration can range from \$20 to \$50. Some companies offer some additional services if you pay an annual fee.

This stray dog is being scanned for a microchip at an animal shelter. When a chip is detected, the reader will chirp and display the chip's unique ID number. Then the appropriate registry is contacted for owner information.



Canine Distemper

A few decades ago, this lethal virus was responsible for thousands of dog deaths annually. It's easy to prevent with timely vaccination, but treatment remains a challenge.

Canine distemper virus (CDV) was once a common killer of dogs and other animals. Cats, ferrets, and raccoons are also quite susceptible to contracting this virus, but dogs are considered the “reservoir” host. This means that CDV prefers to hang out in dogs, and they serve as a source of infection.

However, thanks to a very effective and readily available vaccine, distemper has become fairly rare in companion canines. Still, CDV is not eradicated, so it's important to recognize the signs and symptoms of this virus. This is especially true if you are dealing with puppies in shelter or foster settings, “backyard-bred” dogs, or dogs that have been imported from other countries.

Currently, the most likely place that CDV is encountered is in rescued puppies in shelters. These pups often have multiple health issues and suppressed immune systems, making them more susceptible to illness. Many of these puppies have gastrointestinal (GI) parasites like roundworms and hookworms, and external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites. As a final insult, many have received poor nutrition prior to rescue.

All of these factors contribute to a poor immune response, so when a life-threatening virus makes the rounds, puppies are often the first infected. And when you house them in a stressful shelter, they become prime targets for opportunistic bacteria and viruses.

CDV is spread through respiratory secretions; sneezing and coughing are frequent modes of transmission. As you can imagine, in a shelter, there may be lots of both! This is exacerbated by the sort of crowded and stressful housing conditions that are often seen in rescues. Dogs *can* mount successful immune responses and fight the disease off, but it's more difficult to do in a shelter.



The incubation period between exposure and the development of clinical signs in unprotected dogs may be as little as one week to as long as six weeks, with the majority of dogs showing signs within one to four weeks.

Making control of the contagion more difficult is the fact that dogs who are infected with distemper can start shedding the virus (be contagious) up to five days prior to the onset of clinical signs of the illness.

SIGNS OF DISTEMPER

The clinical signs of CDV occur in stages and in three main body systems: the upper respiratory tract, the gastrointestinal tract, and the central nervous system.

Initially, a dog may show signs consistent with upper respiratory disease: coughing, sneezing, high fever, lethargy, and nasal and eye discharge. This is often mistaken for other canine respiratory tract infections like parainfluenza, influenza, and Bordetella.

At the same time, or slightly after the development of the respiratory signs, a dog may demonstrate GI upset (vomiting and diarrhea). Afterward, recovery may seem to occur.

Puppies who were born in or brought to a shelter or rescue kennel at a very young age are at the greatest risk for contracting canine distemper virus (CDV). Stress and crowding can both depress their immune systems and enable easy transmission of the virus (if present).

Generally, however, within one to three weeks, neurological signs may develop. These can include myoclonus (a rhythmic jerking of a group of muscles), seizures, and behavior changes. “Gum chewing” seizures are a well-known manifestation of neurological distemper. They look exactly like they sound – the dog sporadically displays a rhythmic chewing motion.

It is important to know that the three stages of infection present in this order as a general rule; as with any rule, there are exceptions. Dogs can demonstrate only neurological symptoms or only upper respiratory symptoms. Thus, CDV should always be suspected in young dogs with symptoms in *any* of those systems.

The severity of these symptoms varies widely with the immune status of the dog. If a dog has a healthy immune system, she may successfully fight off the disease and clear it from her body with no long-term effects and minimal clinical signs. In some cases, there will be permanent damage to the enamel of the dog’s teeth, as well as marked thickening of the foot pads (called “hardpad disease”). If a dog is immunosuppressed in any way, the symptoms tend to hit her harder and have a higher risk of death.

DIAGNOSIS

There is no simple bedside test for canine distemper. In fact, diagnosing it

can be a little tricky. Your veterinarian will start with a thorough physical examination (a “nose-to-tail” assessment including vitals like heart rate, weight, and rectal temperature) and a detailed history. This should include questions about where your puppy was adopted and any history of illness, as well as vaccine status.

If your vet suspects CDV, he may recommend one of several tests. Initially, he will likely run blood tests to check red and white blood cell counts, as well as organ function. In the early stages of infection, there may be mild anemia and a low lymphocyte (white blood cell) count. The veterinarian may also look at a blood smear, as dogs with CDV can have small “inclusion bodies” noted in their white blood cells. This is a rare finding and it’s unlikely that your veterinarian will see this, but it never hurts to look!

If your vet suspects concurrent pneumonia, x-rays of the chest will be recommended. For a thorough work-up, a urinalysis may also be conducted.

There are several specific laboratory tests that may be used to diagnose CDV. The most frequently utilized is the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, which works well to detect distemper in dogs who have not yet been vaccinated against distemper – but which does

not reliably discriminate between a dog who is actually infected with distemper and a dog who has been vaccinated against it.

In February 2017, the veterinary diagnostic laboratory Idexx announced that it now offers a test that can differentiate between vaccinal strain interference and actual infection with CDV. In an infected dog, the level of replicating virus is exponentially higher than that found in a vaccine. The quantitative test that is now offered will give actual levels of the vaccine strain present, helping to distinguish between distemper vaccination and true infection.

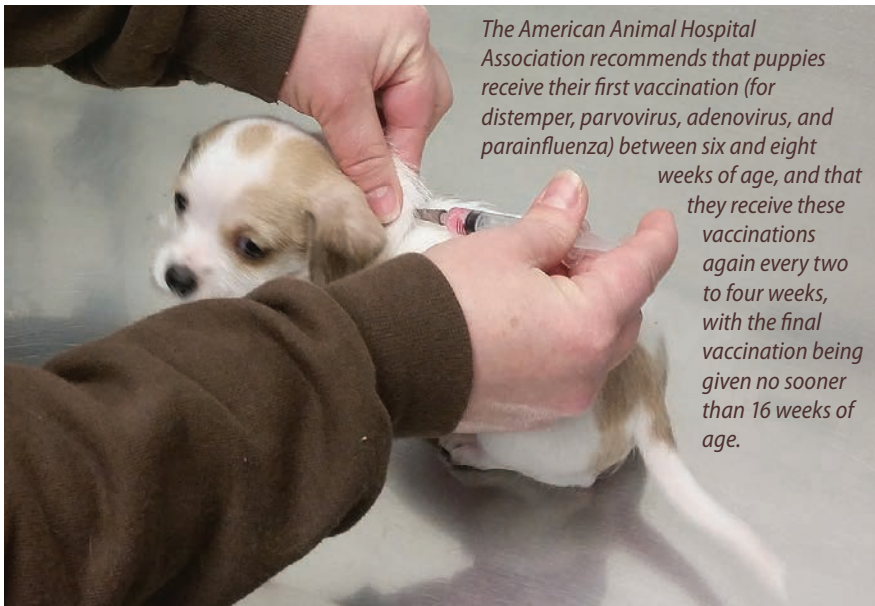
Another test that your veterinarian may recommend is an immunofluorescence assay (IFA). The problem with this test is that it is generally only positive for the first three weeks after infection. Often, distemper isn’t suspected until the development of neurological signs. That may be beyond the period where it is reliably detected by IFA. As a result, this test gives positive results only in certain groups of patients.

Usually, a diagnosis of distemper can be confirmed through the combination of the dog’s history, veterinary examination, and PCR testing with blood, urine, or a swab from the eye (called a conjunctival sample). But owners should be aware that there are cases that elude certain confirmation.

DISTEMPER TREATMENT

Unfortunately, the only treatment for CDV consists of basic supportive care. It is a virus, so antibiotics are not warranted specifically to fight the distemper. Frequently, though, the illness can trigger secondary bacterial infections like pneumonia, in which case antibiotics will be indicated.

Medications such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) may be used to reduce fever and inflammation, as well as to help the dog feel better. Patients who aren’t eating or drinking will need IV fluids and IV antibiotics. If the dog isn’t eating, nutrition may be supplied via the placement of a feeding tube.



The American Animal Hospital Association recommends that puppies receive their first vaccination (for distemper, parvovirus, adenovirus, and parainfluenza) between six and eight weeks of age, and that they receive these vaccinations again every two to four weeks, with the final vaccination being given no sooner than 16 weeks of age.

Pneumonia often develops in CDV patients. This is treated as above and with the addition of oxygen therapy, nebulization (a device that delivers medication via a mist that is inhaled into the lungs), and coupage (a physical therapy during which the dog's chest is struck in a precise way with cupped hands). These treatments help loosen and clear secretions in the lungs.

If your dog is hospitalized, she will be kept in an isolation ward, as CDV is highly contagious and spread through sneezing and coughing.

PROGNOSIS

It is not hopeless if you have a puppy diagnosed with CDV, but the road to a complete recovery can be a long one, and a rosy outcome is never certain. Prognosis depends on the presence or absence of neurological signs like myoclonus and seizures.

If a puppy survives the initial infection, she may go on to live a fairly normal life – or she may experience persistent seizure activity and myoclonus indefinitely. These can sometimes be managed with anti-seizure medications, but the prognosis is very hard to predict.

Two other unsightly after effects of a distemper infection, enamel hypoplasia (no development of enamel on the teeth) and thickened nose and footpads (hyperkeratosis) also can persist for life.

PREVENTION

Finally, for the good news: Vaccinations for CDV are available at any general practice veterinary clinic and are highly effective.

There are two types of distemper vaccines: modified live and recombinant. Modified live vaccines (MLVs) offer the strongest protection from the disease. They also pose a tiny risk of conferring a CDV infection. However, according to veterinary virologist Dr. Melissa Kennedy at the University of Tennessee, the chances of this happening are “virtually nil” – the risk for reversion to an infective

Callejera's story

Many veterinarians and veterinary technicians travel to third-world countries to help with preventive health clinics. These are invaluable services that protect both animal and human health worldwide. But sometimes, the big heartedness of these individuals leads to heartbreak.

That's how Callejera (Spanish for “street dog”) came to the United States from the Dominican Republic. She was a stray presented to a preventive clinic. “Callie” quickly stole the heart of April, an American veterinary technician who was volunteering at the clinic. Callie was vaccinated and spayed, despite having a fever and some eye discharge. Despite the fact that Callie's history was unknown, April elected to adopt Callie and bring her back to the United States.



Callie did well for about a week once the fever subsided. She easily won the devotion of all who knew her. Then she became very ill. She began to vocalize and “bite” at her legs – and even bit at April. She became lethargic and disoriented. Then her back legs began to jerk rhythmically, all day, every day. She cried

in pain, day and night. Antibiotics, pain relief, and gentle, loving nursing care did not give her any relief. A number of possible diagnoses, including panosteitis and other infectious diseases, were entertained and ruled out.

After a few days and failed treatment, distemper was considered as a possible diagnosis, and tests confirmed this suspicion. The most likely explanation is that she already had been infected with distemper before she got vaccinated. Despite supportive care, Callie was suffering and only getting worse. She was showered with love and treats by April and the staff of the veterinary specialty clinic, and then she was peacefully euthanized. She drifted off in the arms of the person who loved her.

Callie's story is sad but serves as an important reminder that dogs imported from other countries often bring with them a host of parasites and infectious diseases. Careful consideration should be given to the risks, as well as the possible heartbreak, of adopting dogs from third-world countries.

strain is so low that we take that very tiny risk over the much greater risk of CDV infection from other infected dogs.

The other type of CDV vaccine is a recombinant vaccine – one that has been produced through recombinant DNA technology. These vaccines have zero chance of ever reverting to a pathogenic strain, but historically were considered less effective than MLV vaccines. More recent studies have demonstrated that they are just as effective as the modified live vaccines, and thus are being used more frequently (and are what we use in my veterinary clinic).

Immunity takes about two weeks to develop after vaccination. The

immune system must be given time to recognize the virus and then produce antibodies against it.

Because of the possibility that maternal antibodies can interfere with earlier vaccinations, puppies shouldn't be considered safely immunized against distemper until they have received a vaccine when they are past 18 to 20 weeks of age (the age at which no more maternal antibody interference is possible). 🐾

Catherine Ashe graduated the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine in 2008. Dr. Ashe practiced ER medicine for nine years and now works as a relief veterinarian in Asheville, North Carolina, and loves the GP side of medicine.



A Proactive Approach

Advice from a professional dog trainer.

There's a significant difference between professional dog trainers and many dog owners: Owners tend to react to things the dog has done that they don't like; in their minds, this reaction is what might be called "training." In contrast, trainers set up situations so that their canine pupils don't have any opportunities to practice undesired behaviors, *and* actively teach dogs how rewarding it is to perform desirable alternative behaviors, instead.

The good news: You don't have to be a professional trainer to reap the advantages of trainers' effective tactics!

A couple of factors are pivotal to the success of this approach. The first is to recognize that there are no "good" nor "bad" behaviors. Behavior is just information and communication. Once you understand this key element you can shift your goals from stopping "bad" behavior to looking for ways to encourage the behavior that you want to see again and again.

Second: Recognize that when your dog is doing something that you don't like he may often not be *giving* you a hard time, but instead he might be *having* a hard time. If you support and guide your dog in learning the behaviors that will result in reinforcements, you won't have to spend so much time contemplating punishment scenarios.

Dogs who already display unwanted behaviors (such as jumping up, barking when people come over, pulling on leash, etc.) may have you trying ways to stop or decrease the behavior – punishment-based reactions. But punishment can result in potentially dangerous side effects (including canine apathy, aggression, escape/avoidance, and generalized fear).

Worse – the punishment is frequently ineffective, because the dog has *no clue* what he *should be doing* instead!

PLANNING AHEAD

The proactive approach is to know in advance about what you would like for your dog to be doing, and actively teach him to do these things – or to simply "catch him in the act" of doing these things and reinforce those behaviors!

For example, instead of focusing on your dog's jumping and fretting about how to make him *stop it*, "mark" (with the click of a clicker or a verbal marker, such as the word "Yes!") and reinforce him when he's got four paws on the floor. Teach him to sit on cue, or train a "default sit" (where he is reinforced for sitting any time you are paying attention to him and haven't given him any cue). Continue marking and reinforcing sitting and "four on the floor" and you'll see more of it. And do it before he has an opportunity to jump!

In addition to reinforcing easy alternatives to the undesired behavior, think about your environment. Arranging antecedents – the things that occur right before the behavior you want or don't want – allows you to set up your situation so that your dog will have the best chance at successfully doing the stuff you like, and not doing the stuff you don't like.

To use our jumping example again: Position a baby gate or exercise pen that separates your dog from visitors. Demonstrate how they can greet or pet your dog over the gate when all four of the dog's feet are on the floor, but should take their hands away if the dog is jumping. Or, plan to greet visitors with your dog on-leash while working on your training. This way you are setting your dog up to be successful by preventing him from practicing jumping. 🐾

Terrie Hayward is a certified professional animal trainer and the owner of Positive Animal Wellness, LLC, in Rincon, Puerto Rico. She is the author of A Deaf Dog Joins the Family: Training, Education, and Communication for a Smooth Transition, as well as well as Your 10 Minute a Day Dog, and co-author of the new book, Grooming Without Stress: Safer, Quicker, Happier. See page 24 for contact and book-purchasing information.

Steps to success:

1: Set up your environment to prevent your dog from practicing the unwanted behavior.

2: Reinforce any calm and relaxed behavior.

3: Begin to teach incompatible behaviors that you want to see more often (settle on a mat, sit for duration, etc). Be sure to reinforce them swiftly and frequently.





Comfort Your Dog

Contrary to a persistent myth, you won't reinforce your dog's fear by reassuring him when he's frightened or anxious.

Like many dog training schools, at my school, AutumnGold Dog Training Center, we include an orientation night each session. Owners attend that session without their dogs to learn about our training philosophy and methods. Because it is not unusual for young dogs to react with a bit of anxiety on the first night of class, we teach students how to reduce their dogs' stress and provide methods for helping dogs to feel secure and safe during class.

Recently, one of my students asked, "Should I comfort my dog when we arrive at class? I have been told that I should not pet or speak softly to my dog if he is upset or anxious because that will reward his fear. Is this true?"

I typically answer this question with a parable about clowns.

I am petrified of clowns, like most rational adult humans (right?!). Everything about them is creepy to me – their red bulbous noses, crazy orange hair, ridiculous cartoon-sized shoes – all of it!

So, let's imagine that my front doorbell rings and outside is the guy pictured above, grinning and giving me two big thumbs-up. Responding to my shrieks, my husband Mike comes running and attempts to calm me. (In reality, Mike would be bolting out of the back door with the dogs, yelling "Save Yourself"!)

For the sake of my anecdote, let's say he's hanging tough and comforting me.

Would Mike's comfort cause my clown fear to increase? Of course not! Nothing can make me more fearful of clowns! Instead, it's reasonable to assume that having someone talk to me calmly, explaining to me that clowns are not dangerous (yeah, right!) will reduce my anxiety.

CAN WE REINFORCE FEAR?

There is absolutely no evidence, not one bit, suggesting that providing comfort and security to a distressed dog causes the dog's anxiety or fear to increase. Why then, does



© Alexander Raths
Dreamstime.com

this myth persist among dog owners and even with some trainers? Why are owners still advised to ignore their dog when he is distressed or anxious or fearful, as if providing any attention to the dog will reinforce those emotions? I suspect that it has to do with confusion about the difference between an emotional response (which is under very little conscious control) and a learned (operant) response (which is under varying degrees of conscious control).

LESSONS FROM LEARNING THEORY

A learning theory clears up this confusion for us. Stress, anxiety, and fear are emotional responses. We do not choose to be anxious or fearful; we actually have very little control over these responses.

Conversely, any behaviors that someone uses to successfully escape or avoid fear-inducing situations are operant; we have some control over these. If these behaviors are successful – in that they lead to a reduction

We hope you are not as frightened of clowns as Linda Case is... But if you are, would it make your fear any worse if a loved one said calming things to you when you were looking at the picture of the clown? Providing comfort to a truly frightened human, dog, or any other animal won't make his fear any worse.

in anxiety and fear – they will indeed be reinforced. This is called avoidance learning and happens when fleeing a fear-producing experience results in a reduction of fear.

For example, if I ran away from the clown at my door, I would experience relief from my fear. (Assuming, of course, that the clown was not chasing me, as I am certain they do.) Because the strategy of running away was successful in reducing my fear and keeping me safe, I would, in all likelihood, repeat this tactic if I once again found a clown at the door. In this example, we say that “the behavior of running away from clowns has been negatively reinforced.”

Dogs, of course, also learn this way. For example, a dog who is nervous around unfamiliar people may hide behind the couch whenever someone new enters her home. The behavior of hiding is negatively reinforced each time that the dog uses it as a strategy, because hiding allows the dog to avoid exposure to new people and results in an abatement of her fear. Unfortunately, this becomes a double-edged sword – if the dog preemptively hides each time that she hears someone at the door, she never has the opportunity to learn that visitors are not actually harmful (more about this later).

Avoidance learning is *not* the same as “reinforcing fear.” It’s important to remember that anxiety and stress and fear are basic emotional responses that are involuntary and have important biological functions. Our dogs do not choose to be anxious or fearful. These are reactions to situations that a dog perceives to be unfamiliar or threatening. It is false to state that a dog chooses or willingly decides to experience fear. However, this is

This formerly feral dog tends to panic and shut down in new environments. Tail tightly tucked between his legs, he is too scared to try the treats that have been offered. He hasn’t chosen to be terrified, he just is! Sitting quietly with him and offering him comfort won’t “reinforce” his fear.

exactly what is implied when owners are advised to ignore their dog when he is anxious or fearful due to the erroneous belief that comforting will reinforce the dog’s fear. It just ain’t so.

PROVIDING COMFORT

Should we comfort our dogs when they are nervous? Okay, if we accept that providing comfort and care to a distressed dog does not reinforce fear, do we know whether or not providing comfort in the form of petting and speaking softly to our dogs helps to reduce their anxiety? Although it certainly feels like it should, do we have evidence that supports or refutes this?

Although still limited in scope, there is a growing body of research that addresses this question. For example, last year, a group of researchers in France reported that dogs who were examined in a veterinary setting with their owner present and comforting them demonstrated reduced signs of stress when compared with dogs who were examined with the owner seated away from them (see “Veterinary Visits: It’s Important to Be There for Your Dog,” WDJ June 2018).

Recently, another study,¹ conducted by Chiara Mariti’s research team at the University of Pisa in Italy,

examined the effects of gentle petting upon a dog’s stress level during a subsequent period of separation. Here is what they found:

THE STUDY

The study included a group of 10 dogs and their owners. Each dog was tested in two conditions while visiting a training center that was unfamiliar to the dog and owner. In the “petting” condition, the owner gently petted their dog for a period of one minute, while talking to a friendly stranger. In the “no petting” scenario, the owner talked to the stranger without petting their dog.

In both settings, the dog’s leash was then handed to the stranger and the owner left the area and remained out of sight for three minutes. The researchers video recorded each test and measured the dogs’ heart rates, salivary cortisol levels, and behaviors before, during, and after separation.

RESULTS

Although the differences between the two groups were not dramatic, the researchers did report a few interesting findings:

- Heart rate: When dogs were not petted by the owners prior





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It's a good thing if your dog trusts you to protect him and seeks comfort from you! Imagine how terrifying it would be to live with someone you could not count on for support and guidance when you were terrified or anxious!

to separation, their heart rates did not change. Conversely, when they were petted prior to separation, heart rates decreased (difference approached statistical significance; $P = 0.07$). This result suggests that petting either prevented or reduced the stress response associated with separation of the dog from the owner.

- **Calm behaviors:** The petting scenario resulted in significantly longer periods of calm behaviors exhibited by the dogs while they were separated from their owner, compared to the no petting scenario (38 seconds versus 11 seconds of calm behavior, respectively).
- **Overall, not highly stressed:** In general, the dogs in both conditions displayed mild behavioral signs of stress, some vocalizations, and oriented toward the area that the owner exited. However, these signs were not severe and salivary cortisol levels after separation were not elevated, suggesting that the level of stress induced by this test was relatively low.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this pilot study suggest that, when dogs are subjected to a mildly stressful situation such as a short separation from their owner, gentle petting prior to the separation can promote reduced feelings of stress and calmer behaviors. While this is not earth-shattering stuff, it is a nice bit of evidence showing that providing comfort and a secure base to our dogs is a good thing and not something to be discouraged.

The moral of the story? If we believe that comforting a loved one when they are distressed is the right thing to do (i.e., we should comfort those who we love), why would we not consider this to be an appropriate approach with our dogs? Fear/anxiety is not a choice. The caring (and effective) approach to dealing with a dog's anxious response is to calmly and quietly come to the dog's aid and remove him from the anxiety-provoking situation.

In our training classes, we quickly

move dogs who appear stressed to a quiet corner or behind a set of visual barriers. We teach owners how to “body block” so that they act as their dog's safe base. We encourage owners to sit on the floor and allow their dog to lie close or in their lap (size permitting) as the dog gradually acclimates to the new setting and commotion of class.

In some cases, we may partition off a small section of the training floor with gates. We find that this often allows timid dogs to be introduced to the class once they are comfortable and happy.

It is the responsibility of each of us, as our dogs' caretakers, to protect them from excessively stressful and frightening situations. Simply ignoring a dog's stress in a misguided attempt to change behavior is counter-intuitive to most owners who love their dogs – as it should be. Not only does comfort not reinforce fear, we have evidence that our dogs benefit from our comfort and support by showing reductions in stress and anxiety. Be there for your dog, always.

And remember, a fear of clowns is real. If you see a clown coming my way, don't get between me and the door! 🐾

Linda P. Case is the owner of AutumnGold Consulting & Dog Training Center in Mahomet, Illinois. Linda is the author of Dog Food Logic, has a new book, Dog Smart, and writes The Science Dog blog at thesciencedog.wordpress.com. See page 24 for contact and book information.

CITED STUDY

1 Mariti C, Carlone B, Protti M, Diverio S, Gazzano A. “Effects of petting before a brief separation from the owner on dog behavior and physiology: A pilot study.” *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* 2018; 27:41-46.



Reporting, Your Duty

When new drugs, pesticides, vaccines, and foods hit the market, they are in effect being tested on our dogs. If problems arise, we need to let the regulators know.

If your dog suffers any unexpected adverse reaction to his food, topical pesticides, oral medications, or vaccine, it should be reported to the appropriate regulating agency. Each "pebble on the pile" gives regulators more data to consider when reviewing the safety of these products.

It seems that is rare for a week to go by that we don't hear about – or even experience – yet another pet illness or reaction to animal food, drugs, vaccines, or pesticides. At times, *Whole Dog Journal's* articles and blog posts will include the advice to "report any adverse events." And it's excellent advice – so here's when, how, and why you should report these events.

ADVERSE EVENTS DEFINED

Animal drugs, vaccines, and pesticides are subjected to tests to establish their safety and efficacy. However, this evaluation process is typically conducted on a relatively small number of animals prior to being approved and marketed. As a result, there is potential for previously unobserved problems to emerge after the product is approved, goes on the market, and is administered to a larger population of animals.

An adverse event (AE) in animals is any unfavorable or unintended occurrence that happens during or after use of an animal drug or veterinary product or device. Suspected lack of efficacy and reactions by humans exposed to the product or treated animals also qualify as adverse events.

ADVERSE EVENTS OR SIDE EFFECTS?

It is important to clarify the difference between adverse events and side effects. Side effects are secondary undesired effects that may occur when using a specific drug and have been shown to be associated with the product by scientific studies. Side effects are tracked and investigated extensively during clinical trials before entering the market. In contrast, adverse events are not consistent

with applicable product information or characteristics of the drug.

It is important to consult with your veterinarian about potential side effects associated with a product prior to use. For example, a lump forming at the site of a vaccination is a known side effect; it is not an adverse event. If your dog does experience a serious issue after a vaccine, the administration of a drug or pesticide treatment, or eating pet food or treats, contact your veterinarian or veterinary emergency clinic immediately.

Reporting side effects is still a good idea, however. Even though side effects may be known, reporting these can be an effective means of heightening awareness of a particular issue with the product and could possibly lead to additional product review, especially if the side effects are serious.

WHEN SHOULD YOU FILE A REPORT?

One of the responsibilities of the U.S. federal government is ensuring the safe and healthful use of products within the United States. If your pet experiences a serious side effect or an adverse event, a report should be filed with the appropriate governing agency.

If you're uncertain about whether you should file a report or the process, ask your veterinarian for guidance. Often veterinarians themselves will handle it; if this occurs, there is no need for you to report the incident. If your veterinarian has not reported the AE or was not involved, you should make the report yourself. In either case, it is important to report it as soon as possible, as timely reporting enables agencies to take any necessary action quickly.

There are several government agencies that oversee the reporting of veterinary adverse events and the process varies with each department. Regardless of the government agency involved, the manufacturer of the product should also be notified of the adverse event.

■ **Animal drugs.** All veterinary drugs (and devices) are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM) under the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. New veterinary drugs must first be approved for use by the CVM. The CVM evaluates the product and establishes the safety, effectiveness, and conditions of use; this information is required to be on the product labeling. After approval, the CVM will continue to monitor the use of these products to ensure that they remain safe and effective; this monitoring activity is referred to pharmacovigilance.

Thousands of drugs are administered to pets every day. There are often side effects, but hopefully those are known, minor, and temporary. When a pet has an unexpected reaction to a veterinary

drug, it is important to file an Adverse Drug Event (ADE) report. This report can be filed by directly with the FDA by pet owners. To do so, see tinyurl.com/report-dog-ADE.

There you will find the link to download the PDF Form FDA 1932a, "Adverse Experience, Lack of Effectiveness or Product Defect Report." This form is used to report adverse drug experiences for any animal drug (whether the drug is FDA-approved or not).

The CVM requests that the report be as detailed as possible and include everything from the brand of food and treats your pet eats, to any supplements your pet is given, along with your pet's medical history (including names and amounts of all drugs, information about any recent surgeries or procedures, veterinary test results and examination

findings), as well as any other relevant information. The more details you provide, the more information the CVM has available to research the issue. Upon completion, email the form to CVM1932a@fda.hhs.gov.

Both the CVM and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) recommend also reporting any adverse drug events directly to the manufacturer. Manufacturers are required to report any adverse drug experiences to the FDA. The drug manufacturer's information is usually on the product packaging, including prescription bottles received from the pharmacy. You may also report the event directly to the CVM.

■ **Pet food and treats.** Adverse events related to pet food and treats also fall under the CVM's jurisdiction. The responsibilities of

Why Report Adverse Events?

In March 2017, the CVM distributed a "Dear Doctor" letter to veterinarian professionals in response to their findings from the examination of three reported cases of hyperthyroidism in dogs of varying ages and in separate households that were fed canned dog food from at least one of two companies (FDA Dear Doctor letter, "Exogenous Hyperthyroidism and Thyroid in Pet Food," March 27, 2017).

The CVM's research into these three cases found that it warranted widespread notification and the resulting letter detailed their research, findings, and actions. It was determined that the pet food contained exogenous sources of thyroid hormone, capable of causing clinical signs. The manufacturer recalled the implicated lots of the two foods that had been fed to the affected dogs. (The health of the dogs improved after eating different food.)

By reporting AEs and other problems experienced with animal products, pet owners, veterinary professionals, and manufacturers play a valuable role in maintaining health and safety. Reports act as an alert system, not only for the governing agency, but also for pet owners and veterinary professionals. The government, manufacturers, and veterinarians receive critical information to determine if further investigation is warranted.

When it happens to our pets, naturally we feel it is warranted. As evident in the example above, the reporting of just *three* cases resulted in an investigation and recall,

demonstrating that reporting is effective and can contribute to our pets' health and welfare.

Investigations triggered by AEs can lead to changes in a product's labeling or use, the release of safety warnings and communications, product recalls, and even the rescinding of agency approval or permanent withdrawal of a product from the market. Again, reporting adverse events can be invaluable.

The reporting systems do have some deficiencies. Being "passive surveillance systems," there is no active search for cases but rather the reliance on obtaining initial data from the reports submitted. This type of system can suffer from under-reporting (reports aren't submitted) or over-reporting (reports submitted are not related to the suspected product). Furthermore, receipt of a report does not necessarily mean that the product caused an adverse event, or even that a particular event actually occurred.

If your pet experiences an adverse event, seek veterinary treatment. If you suspect it is due to a drug, food or treats, vaccine, or pesticide, you may want to consider obtaining special diagnostics, such as having a pet food tested by a private laboratory. Be aware, however, that these expenses will not be covered by the regulating agency, but may assist in the treatment of your pet and add valuable data to your report.



the CVM include ensuring that pet food “is safe, made under sanitary conditions, and properly labeled” as well as verifying that a “food additive for use in food for animals is safe and effective before approving it.” Reports regarding pet food and treats can be filed electronically using the CVM’s Safety Reporting Portal. See tinyurl.com/report-bad-dog-food.

Problems such as mold or foreign objects in food should also be reported as they can pose a health and safety issue for other pets.

The other option for reporting issues with pet food and treats is to call your state’s FDA Consumer Complaint Coordinator. You can use this link to find your representative: tinyurl.com/find-state-FDArep.

Before you call or start your online report, assemble all the relevant data. A detailed list of the information you should have on hand to complete your report is listed here: tinyurl.com/ADE-report-list.

■ **Animal vaccines.** Vaccines for pets are regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture via the Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB). The CVB is involved with the regulation of products that diagnose, prevent, or treat animal diseases as well as ensuring that veterinary biologics, such as vaccines, are safe and effective. Detailed information about reporting vaccine-related AEs can be found here: tinyurl.com/how-to-report-dog-vaccine.

The preferred method for reporting an adverse event associated with a vaccine is through the CVB’s online reporting system: tinyurl.com/bad-vaccine-report.

Reports may also be submitted by telephone by calling the CVB at (800) 752-6255, or by downloading the Adverse Report Form and faxing it to (515) 337-6120, or sending via mail to Center for Veterinary Biologics, 1920 Dayton Avenue, PO Box 844, Ames, Iowa 50010.

Again, it is recommended that vaccine-related adverse events also be submitted directly to the vaccine manufacturer. In addition

to simply taking the report, many of these manufacturers have in-house veterinary services departments that not only receive such reports but also may be able to provide diagnostic advice, treatment recommendations, and guidance on product use.

■ **Pesticides.** There are a number of pest-control products used in association with our pets, especially for eradication of ectoparasites and insects. The FDA regulates the flea and tick products that are given *orally* (making them qualify as a medication), including Bravecto, Nexgard, Simparica, and Credelio.

If a product is regulated by the FDA, it may be labeled with the statement “Approved by the FDA” followed by a six-digit New Animal Drug Application (NADA) number or, for generic drugs, an Abbreviated New Animal Drug Application (ANADA) number on the packaging or label. If the product’s registration number does not appear on the label, it may take some research to find the number; it’s not required to be present on the label.

Adverse events associated with oral medications that kill internal or external parasites may be reported by the same process as animal drugs (see above), using form FDA 1932a, “Adverse Experience, Lack of Effectiveness or Product Defect Report.”

Topical products, however, are regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), under the Federal Insecticide Fungicide and Rodenticide Act. These can be identified by the EPA Registration Number (sometimes written as EPA Reg. No.) printed on the label.

Look for an EPA registration number on the package, usually near the manufacturer’s information. Adverse events associated with these products, as well as other pesticides, are reported to the National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC).

However, the NPIC electronic reporting system is restricted for use by qualified professionals, such as veterinarians or their staff. Pet owners can still report an adverse effect by a

pesticide on their pet by calling the NPIC directly at (800) 858-7378 and filing a report over the phone.

WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE REPORTS?

The governing agencies all have differing approaches to handling Adverse Event Reports, but in general, these reports are reviewed and evaluated for risks to animal (and/or public) health.

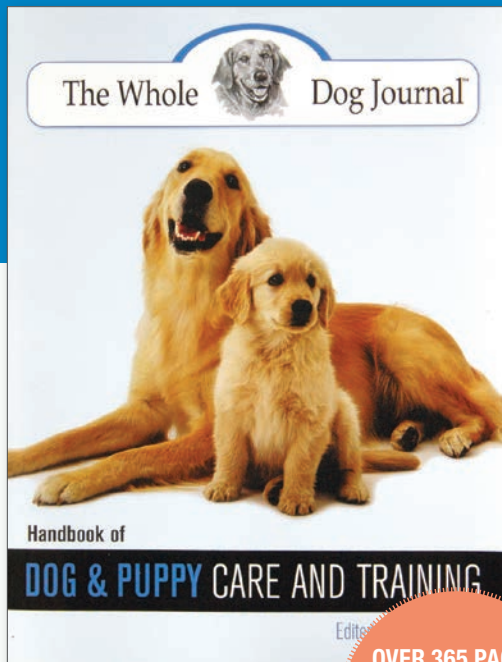
Every report is important; if the AE is assessed to be of concern, the initial review leads to follow-up activity. Products that have caused or may cause a serious illness, injury, or a life-threatening situation are given priority. While monitoring continues indefinitely, the FDA pays particularly close attention to adverse event reports submitted in the first three years following approval of a product.

The CVM has created a database – the Cumulative Adverse Drug Event Summaries Report – “so that veterinarians and animal owners can have easily available access to information about signs that have been associated with drugs.” That database can be accessed here: tinyurl.com/cumulativeADEs.

The database lists the numbers of ADEs received for a particular drug, by species, and route of administration. Sounds great! But at present, the database contains *only* the cumulative summaries of the data received on paper reports for the period between 1987 and April 30, 2013. ADEs have been submitted electronically since then, but the task of collating the paper reports with the electronically submitted reports is not yet complete.

The plan is to eventually have the database brought current and updated monthly – but we aren’t holding our breath. A note on the webpage above says, “We anticipate having updated adverse event information available in late 2017 or early 2018.” 🐾

Barbara Dobbins, a former dog trainer, writes about dogs and studies canine ethology. She lives in the San Francisco Bay area with her dogs, Tico and Parker.



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Terrie Howard is the author of *A Deaf Dog Joins the Family: Training, Education, and Communication for a Smooth Transition*; *Your 10 Minute a Day Dog*; and co-author of the new book, *Grooming Without Stress: Safer, Quicker, Happier*. All of these are available from Amazon.com.

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and her most recent, *Beware of the Dog: Positive Solutions for Aggressive Behavior in Dogs*.

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TRAINERS

Linda P. Case, MS
AutumnGold Consulting and Dog Training Center, Mahomet, IL. (217) 586-4864; autumngoldconsulting.com
Linda Case is a canine nutritionist, science writer, and companion animal consultant who uses positive reinforcement and shaping techniques to modify behavior in dogs in basic level through advanced classes.

Terrie Hayward, KPA-CTP, CPDT-KA, CSAT
Positive Animal Wellness, LLC, Rincon, Puerto Rico. positiveanimalwellness.com; facebook.com/PositiveAnimalWellness
Specializing in work with deaf dogs and in canine separation anxiety cases. Terrie works with families and their animal companions, presents workshops, travels, and consults focusing on positive reinforcement interactions and modifying behavior through applications in behavior analysis.

Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA
Peaceable Paws Dog and Puppy Training Fairplay, MD. (301) 582-9420; peaceablepaws.com
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