

What's Ed Grundy's Problem With Dogs!

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I am more-or-less forced to listen to the Archers, so get my daily pleasure from it by complaining loudly about the grammar, the writing, and occasionally the agricultural and veterinary detail. When, this week, Ed Grundy went off on a tangent blaming dog-walkers and their dogs for the Neosporosis in his herd of Guernseys, I thought, here we go again, not more bad science in the media! It is a particular bugbear of mine, that, and bad grammar.

As it turns out, Ed Grundy is not listening to Alistair, the vet, and is victimising our poor dogs. Understandably, when you have been through the wringer as I am told Ed has, the mind does strange things.

There has never been a proven case of transmission of Neosporosis from dogs to cattle (where it does indeed cause Abortion, a serious problem in any dairy herd, including Ed Grundy's), and the only theoretical route of transmission would be through the faeces of a dog with active disease contaminating cattle feed. What are the chances of that! The chances of spread of disease, however, are much, much more likely through cattle dung contaminating feed. I am sure as the story in The Archers unfolds, that this will prove to be the case.

It is, however, quite an interesting disease in dogs, and I have had the dubious honour of seeing one case, a little too late, in my surgery in my entire career. But that is another story.

Neospora caninum is a protozoan infection (a microbe larger than a bacterium) that can be spread from the bitch to some or all of her puppies if she is carrying a high titre in her bloodstream. This organism is closely related to *Toxoplasma gondii* which most of us has heard of as Toxoplasmosis. The prevalence in dogs is 0.5% to 30%, without presence of

clinical disease. So, up to 30% of dogs may carry the organism in their gut without it causing a problem. It is very important to say at this point that *Neospora caninum* also occurs naturally in cattle, sheep, goats, deer, and horses. There have been no cases in cats and humans. It is called *caninum* because it was, very likely, first found in dogs.

Dogs of any age can get active disease, but it is more usually a problem in puppies. But before we get too worked up about, I have seen, as I have written, only one case in a career of nearly 30 years. Cases can occur in single dog households as well as large establishments, and there is no difference in occurrence in town, cities, or the countryside. The disease is most commonly presented to the vet as a hind leg or hind quarter paralysis in the rapidly growing puppy, but may also present a wide variety of symptoms, including a fever of 'unknown origin'. It can sometimes produce front leg paralyse and other signs that look neurological. You must admit, Neosporosis is not the first thing you think of when a boisterous puppy goes lame. It is equally difficult for the vet.

In clinical cases in dogs the route of infection is usually from the bitch to her puppies, and these puppies may or may not develop actual disease. The other likely route of infection is through raw meat diets.

The good news is that there is a blood test for it. It is called an Indirect Fluorescent Antibody Test. But the vet has to request it. As we have seen, it is not the first thing the vet thinks of when an active puppy is brought in lame. When we see it in an adult dog it is very difficult to know whether the disease was acquired in puppyhood or not.

My advice is: Don't worry about Neosporosis! Keep it in mind when an active puppy suddenly starts to drag a leg (it is treatable with Clindamycin and other similar antibiotics and the progress of disease can be halted). Test your bitch(es) if, thinking back, the symptoms

ring a bell. And, personally, I do not feed our dogs raw diets, and do not encourage it in others.

I hope that, as Ed Grundy's problem in The Archers unfolds, we and our dogs are found innocent.