Dog Disease Gene Believed Identified

Findings could lead to breeding the illness out of Keeshonden.

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An associate professor with the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine says he's identified a genetic marker associated with canine primary hyperparathyroidism, a disease that causes a dog's blood calcium to abnormally increase because of a tumor or abnormal glandular function.

The findings could be used by breeders to make educated breeding decisions, thereby eliminating the disease from the breed. Owners would be able to identify dogs which are positive for the marker and work with their veterinarians to diagnose the disease in its earliest stages, before complications occur.

Canine primary hyperparathyroidism, known as PHPT, is an inherited, late onset disease which causes a dog's blood calcium to abnormally increase.

The Keeshond is the breed most affected by PHPT. Without treatment, dogs with the disease can eventually die of complications caused by the increased calcium.

Dogs who test positive for the marker associated with the disease are more likely to develop the disease as they get older, even if they are healthy at the time of testing, according to Richard E. Goldstein, DVM.

Goldstein, an associate professor of small animal medicine at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine, reports that only one copy of the gene is necessary to pass the disease from an affected Keeshond to its offspring.

Information on the test may be found on Goldstein's website at http://www.vet.cornell.edu/labs/goldstein.