

Canine Cancer, Secondhand Smoke Linked

Studies reveal dogs living in homes with smokers are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer.

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New research shows pets are adversely affected by secondhand smoke, according to Dr. Carolynn MacAllister, an Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service veterinarian.

“There have been a number of scientific papers recently that have reported the significant health threat secondhand smoke poses to pets,” MacAllister says. “Secondhand smoke has been associated with oral cancer and lymphoma in cats, lung and nasal cancer in dogs, as well as lung cancer in birds.”

MacAllister cited a recent study at Colorado State University that found higher incidences of nasal tumors in long-nosed dogs and higher rates of lung cancer in shorter-nosed dogs who lived in homes where they were exposed to secondhand smoke.

In long-nosed dog breeds, such as German Shepherds and Border Collies, the larger surface area of their noses results in more carcinogen exposure where it tends to build up, MacAllister says.

For short- and medium-nosed dogs, such as Pugs and Bulldogs, the carcinogens tend to build in the lungs, she says. “The reason short- and medium-nosed dogs have a higher occurrence of lung cancer is because their shorter nasal passages aren’t as effective at accumulating the inhaled secondhand smoke. This results in more carcinogens reaching the lungs,” she explains.

Inhaling smoke is not the only danger cigarettes pose to pets, as curious dogs can eat tobacco products that can cause nicotine poisoning when ingested.

To keep risk to a minimum, smokers should have a designated smoking area that is separated from the home, keep tobacco products in a location where dogs are unable to access them or stop smoking all together, MacAllister recommends.