

CANINE LYMPHOMA

VETERINARY SPECIALISTS OF NORTH TEXAS

Canine lymphomas are among the most common cancers diagnosed in dogs. There are multiple described types of canine lymphoma, and these cancers can vary tremendously in their behavior. Some canine lymphomas are rapidly progressive and are quickly life-threatening without treatment, while others progress very slowly over time. Lymphomas may affect any organ in the body, but most commonly originate in lymph nodes. The most common type of lymphoma, multicentric lymphoma, presents as multiple enlarged lymph nodes. Other common lymphomas in dogs include cutaneous lymphoma (lymphoma of the skin), alimentary or gastrointestinal lymphoma (lymphoma of the stomach and/or intestines) and mediastinal lymphoma (lymphoma involving organs within the chest).

WHAT CAUSES LYMPHOMA IN DOGS?

Although several possible causes have been investigated, the cause of this cancer in dogs remains obscure. Suppression of the immune system is a known risk factor for the development of lymphoma in humans. However, the link between immune suppression and lymphoma in dogs is not clearly established.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS OF CANINE LYMPHOMA?

The most common initial sign of multicentric lymphoma in dogs is enlarged lymph nodes, which will feel like a hard lump under your dog's skin. Other common signs may include loss of appetite, lethargy, weight loss, swelling of the face or legs, and increased thirst and urination. Lymphoma of the skin tends to appear first as dry, flaky, red, and itchy patches of skin anywhere on the body. Lymphoma of the skin may progress slowly and often has been treated for several months as an infection or allergy before a diagnosis of lymphoma is made. This form of lymphoma may also appear in the mouth, often affecting the gums, lips, and the roof of the mouth. Dogs with lymphoma of the gastrointestinal tract usually have signs such as vomiting, watery diarrhea, and weight loss. Dogs with mediastinal lymphoma typically have difficulty breathing due to the presence of a mass within the chest or due to accumulation of fluid within the chest.

HOW IS CANINE LYMPHOMA TREATED?

The most effective therapy for most types of canine lymphoma is chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is often well tolerated in dogs, in comparison to humans. There are numerous chemotherapy treatment protocols for dogs with multicentric lymphoma. Different types of lymphoma may be treated with different chemotherapy drugs. At VSNT, we will review multiple treatment options, from the options that achieve the longest remission to palliative/hospice-type treatment options for your pet. Your veterinary oncologists will help you decide on a treatment protocol that is appropriate for your dog. Please see our chemotherapy FAQ's page for more information on chemotherapy treatment.

WHAT DOES REMISSION MEAN?

Remission means a regression of your dog's cancer. In general, 70-95% of dogs with multicentric lymphoma treated with chemotherapy experience complete or partial remission of their lymphoma, with most dogs experiencing complete remission.

WHAT IS THE PROGNOSIS FOR DOGS WITH LYMPHOMA?

Several factors determine your dog's prognosis: what type of lymphoma he or she has, the type of chemotherapy is used to treat the lymphoma, whether or not you choose rescue therapy, and/or stage of the lymphoma. Your oncologist will discuss your dog's prognosis with you on your initial visit.

The specialty team at VSNT is here to help you formulate a plan that is right for your pet.

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