

Veterinary update

BCSPCA
SPEAKING FOR ANIMALS

Dear Colleagues,

I hope this finds you coping with the pandemic, the veterinarian shortage, and the wildfires as well as possible. This has been a challenging year all around, and we remain profoundly grateful for your work in B.C. communities - most of all, your care of animals from our shelters, cruelty investigations, and community outreach programs.

We wanted to provide an update on canine infectious disease based on the cases and patterns we are seeing around the province. Because animal shelters congregate unfamiliar animals with diverse health histories from various sources, they present an increased risk of disease transmission. Our shelters have no endemic disease, but shelters in general are a type of sentinel for community-level infectious disease. We hope that sharing this information may support you in assessing risk and discussing vaccines with your clients.

As you may have seen in the CVBC's summer newsletter, we have recently observed an increase in canine infectious respiratory disease activity across the province (above our usual summer baseline). Concerningly, for the first time in at least a decade, we've confirmed cases of locally acquired canine distemper virus (CDV). This spring, there were three unrelated clinical cases of CDV in incoming litters of puppies (one on the Island and two in the Interior) confirmed at necropsy to be wild-type CDV with no epidemiological link to travel or imported dogs. The CDV origin is unknown, but transmission from wildlife is considered possible.

We have also been seeing CIRDC cases in both shelter and owned dogs suspected to be caused by one or more highly contagious emerging viral pathogens affecting both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. Due to increased risk associated with confined shelter populations, we routinely perform PCR testing on cases detected in our shelters. An unusual frequency of negative tests or tests with results attributable to vaccine shedding are occurring in the face of explosive spread that resolves without antibiotics, suggesting one or more viral pathogens not detectable in the commercial test may be present. "Hot spots" include Kamloops, southern Vancouver Island, and the Peace region and we are currently actively investigating a 31-dog shelter outbreak in Kamloops with academic and industry specialists.

There is also a newly announced canine influenza outbreak in California (H3N2 subtype) and as borders open, the risk of introduction via travel or dog importation may increase. Taken all together, these cases are good reminders of the importance of history-taking (especially travel and origin, if newly adopted), vaccinating (even if not fully protective, vaccines can help reduce severity and duration of illness especially in the face of co-infection), PCR testing of unusual cases or those in congregate housing settings, and communication between practitioners.



We will continue to share infectious disease updates relevant to veterinary practice, and we encourage you to reach out any time if you'd like to discuss shelter medicine topics!

Thank you for all you do,
Emilia Gordon
Senior Manager, Animal Health

egordon@sPCA.bc.ca

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Do you have questions or feedback for the BC SPCA?

Please email us at
outreach@sPCA.bc.ca

*The British Columbia Society for the
Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC
SPCA) is a not-for-profit organization
reliant on donations from the public.*

Data shows no increase in cat relinquishment following ban on declawing

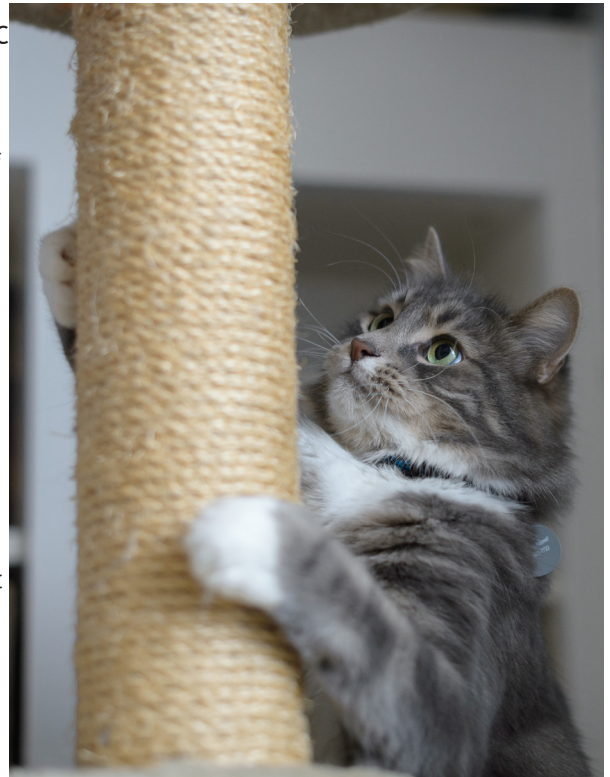
Three years ago, the College of Veterinarians of British Columbia announced a ban on feline declawing. An analysis of feline intake in the BC SPCA's 36 sheltering facilities since 2018 shows no increase in surrender of felines overall or due to destructive scratching behaviour.

"We have seen an overall decrease in cat intake in recent years because of effective spay/neuter initiatives, and when felines are relinquished to our shelters, the vast majority of cases (82.6%) are related to human issues, rather than the animal itself," says Dr. Gordon. The most common reasons for surrender include housing issues, lack of resources, or owner health. The two most common animal-related reasons for relinquishment are house soiling and conflict/aggression – two issues that Dr. Gordon points out are exacerbated in cats who have been declawed.

"Studies show that declawed cats are at higher risk for biting and aggression, are more likely to have trouble using the litterbox, and have a significantly increased chance of back pain."

Dr. Gordon says the data collected at SPCA shelters point to two important factors – that the ban on declawing has not increased cat intake in shelters, and that greater support is needed for families to address the human factors related to pet relinquishment.

"We hope this data can be used by veterinarians, veterinary regulators, animal shelters, and community members to support bans against unnecessary and painful cosmetic surgeries and to begin discussions about how we address the systemic issues in our society that separate families from their pets."



BC SPCA manager receives 2021 CVMA Humane Award



Dr. Emilia Wong Gordon, the BC SPCA's senior manager of animal health, is the recipient of the CVMA's 2021 Humane Award, which honours a Canadian veterinarian whose leadership and care has contributed significantly to the well-being of animals.

In 2020, Dr. Gordon became the first, and currently only, veterinarian practicing in Canada to become board-certified as a specialist with the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners in Shelter Medicine Practice. Since joining the BC SPCA in 2014 she has managed the animal health program for the organization's 36 community animal centres across B.C.

In the past, Dr. Gordon has been recognized for her work on the newly emerging rabbit hemorrhagic disease (RHD) and her contribution to feline health by partnering with researchers at Idexx Reference Laboratories and the University of California, San Francisco to investigate the cause of an unexplained outbreak of feline illness that was occurring in SPCA shelters. This research collaboration led to the discovery of a new virus, a novel chaphamaparvovirus since named fechavirus.

You might be a first responder to an incident of domestic violence

As veterinarians, you may be the first responders to an incident of domestic violence without even realizing. An abused animal may be brought in to your clinic by a domestic violence survivor. That is why it is important to understand how the Violence Link shows up in your work.

The Violence Link is the connection between violence against animals and violence against people. It is predominantly seen in the realm of domestic violence as abuse towards an animal when there is abuse towards a partner is very common.

In a Rhode Island study based on self-reported behaviour, for instance, it was found that out of 307 men who were arrested for domestic violence, 41% had committed at least one act of animal cruelty since the age of 18. This was compared to a group of males who were arrested for other types of violence, where only 3% had previously committed acts of animal cruelty since the age of 18 (Febres et al., 2014).

This connection has been studied across the world for decades, yet is still viewed as a new phenomenon in a practical setting. This is primarily due to lack of education and communication breakdown between organizations in different sectors. For example, police may not think to contact the BC SPCA if there is an animal in the home of a domestic violence incident between two partners and vice versa.

Education opportunity

In the fall, a continuing education program will be available for veterinarians to expand their knowledge of the Violence Link and to be given tools and resources to further aid them in helping pets and their people. Email outreach@spca.bc.ca to be notified when the program is launched.

Veterinary opinion highly valued by B.C. dog owners

Given the countless questions you are asked by clients each and every day, perhaps it will come as no surprise that recent polling commissioned by the BC SPCA on a variety of topics confirms the value of your opinion.

When asked what gives them trust in a trainer or rescue, B.C. dog owners consistently ranked a recommendation from a veterinarian as a top factor – above even the opinions of friends and family members. Clearly, the veterinary community plays an important role in the decisions dog owners make about what trainers to use or rescues to support.

Knowing which trainers or rescues to recommend can be challenging as both are unregulated in the province. This means that, without any oversight, questionable practices that put dog health and welfare at risk can and do persist. Fortunately, there are two resources available that may be helpful when clients come to you for advice:

1. AnimalKind

The AnimalKind program accredits dog trainers who follow the BC SPCA's evidence-based and peer-reviewed humane standards. Visit animalkind.ca for more information.

2. Animal Rescue Standards of Practice

Developed with assistance from the BC SPCA, the standards are intended to help people seeking to adopt from reputable rescues. An accreditation program to accompany the standards is currently being piloted. Check out awanbc.com/projects for details.

Thank you for being such trusted members of your communities in providing your professional opinion to dog owners across B.C.

Pet food bank resources available through BC SPCA

Since the pandemic began, the BC SPCA has adapted to help pet guardians and their pets. One of the ways that the organization has been able to provide assistance for those affected has been through the expansion of its food bank services. Pet food is distributed through BC SPCA community animal centers, social and community partners, and delivery to remote communities.

If your veterinary office has any inquiries for support, please direct the client to the BC SPCA call centre. Staff at the call centre can advise the nearest location to access pet food support.

By working compassionately and proactively with people in need, we can keep animals out of shelters and with their families.

119 dogs update: From hoarding to homes



In March 2021, the North and South Peace BC SPCA branches did an emergency intake of 119 small-breed dogs from an animal hoarding environment in Fort Nelson, B.C. With many pregnant females in the group, that number quickly increased as puppies started to arrive. This case strained the resources of our staff, facilities, medical budgets, and transfer network, but the outcome was worth it! We are happy to report that 146 dogs and puppies were adopted into loving forever homes.

Most of the adult dogs from this group required behavioural treatment for extreme fear and lack of socialization. Most experiences were new to them, from meeting unfamiliar people to riding in cars to walking on leash. Helping these dogs get comfortable with normal daily activities is a long process their adopters will be working on for months.

Where to start with so many dogs and stretched resources? We focused on housing for the first few days. We placed these dogs in same-sex group housing and worked with them as a group. We monitored their welfare by tracking their food and water intake and their behaviour. Once a group was stable and comfortable in their home kennel, we started introducing new experiences.

Although quite fearful of us initially, once they realized that our presence predicted being offered yummy treats, they started to approach people with less fear. We used desensitization and counter-conditioning to get them used to touch and handling such as placing a collar and leash.

Our behavioural criteria for adoption were: 1) consistently friendly and comfortable being around people; and 2) able to tolerate basic body handling. As soon as dogs were healthy enough for adoption and met these behavioural criteria, they were placed in homes where they could continue to learn about living with people. We know they will need help getting used to many more common life experiences, but that work is best done outside of the shelter environment. The best place for dogs to learn how to live in homes with people is in homes with people!

Adopters were counseled about these dogs' history and given realistic expectations of how their behaviour would progress over time. Almost all dogs had to be house-trained, and all needed to be slowly and carefully introduced to new life experiences. In many cases, we helped connect adopters with AnimalKind-accredited trainers either in their communities or online for additional behaviour support.

We want to thank the veterinary professionals, volunteers, staff members, foster families, and animal protection officers who went above and beyond to give these little dogs the lives they deserve! We could not do this work without your support.