



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Veterinary medical issues in puppy mill dogs



Dogs in puppy mills often suffer from painful and potentially life-shortening veterinary problems due to overcrowded and unsanitary conditions and the lack of proper oversight or veterinary care. Conditions common to puppy mills—such as the use of stacked wire cages to house more animals than a given space should reasonably hold and constant exposure to the feces and urine of other dogs—make it difficult for dogs to avoid exposure to parasites and infectious diseases. In addition, a lack of regular and preventive veterinary care, clean food and water, basic cleaning and grooming, and careful daily observation by the operators may cause even minor injuries or infections to linger and fester until they become severe. These disorders cause undue pain and suffering and often result in premature death.

For example:

- When 80 dogs were rescued in July 21, 2011, from a puppy mill in Hertford, North Carolina, a veterinarian with the intake shelter reported that almost 50% of the dogs were afflicted with parasites, 23% suffered from ear infections and 15% suffered from various eye disorders (including some with keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS), a very painful dry eye condition). All animals older than 18 months showed evidence of moderate to severe periodontal disease. One of the dogs had such severe dental disease that she required 32 dental extractions, while others had periodontal disease so severe that it led to bone reabsorption of the mandible (eroded jaw bone). Six dogs suffered from pyoderma (skin disease) secondary to urine-soaked matted fur.

Costs to intake shelters and other nonprofits

A study conducted by the Humane Society of the United States in 2011 found that animal shelters and rescue groups that the HSUS worked with to help treat and place newly rescued puppy mill dogs spent an average of \$259 for veterinary expenses per dog rescued. The HSUS reimbursed the shelters for their expenses. Details from that research include:

- A Houston, Texas, animal shelter spent more than \$24,000 to provide veterinary treatment for 220 dogs rescued from a breeding and hoarding case in January 2011. In addition, the shelter estimated it spent more than \$52,800 for nine days of veterinary boarding and 30 days of sheltering care during the animals' stay at the shelter prior to placement, for a total cost of approximately \$76,800.
- A New Jersey animal rescue organization spend more than \$4,000 caring for just three critically ill puppy mill survivors who required urgent inpatient intensive care after they were removed from a puppy mill in March 2010.
- A Maryland rescue group (Lost Dog and Cat Rescue) that took in five animals relinquished by a puppy mill in January 2011 spent more than \$4,200.00 on the dogs' care, or an average of \$840 per dog. The care included one large mammary tumor removal and biopsy, several animals who required treatment for eye disorders, and a total of 62 dental extractions among the five animals, including one dog who required more than 20 extractions.

- When more than 100 dogs were removed from a puppy mill in Stuarts Draft, Virginia, in August 2009, findings from a 200-page state veterinarian report indicated that out of 80 dogs examined, more than 60% of them suffered from a disorder serious enough to require emergency veterinary care, more than 80% suffered from parasites, almost 40% were underweight, more than 35% were suffering from dehydration, and more than 40% were suffering from eye disorders such as conjunctivitis, ocular infections or KCS. Many of the severely underweight or ill dogs were also pregnant, affecting the survivability of their offspring.

Conclusion

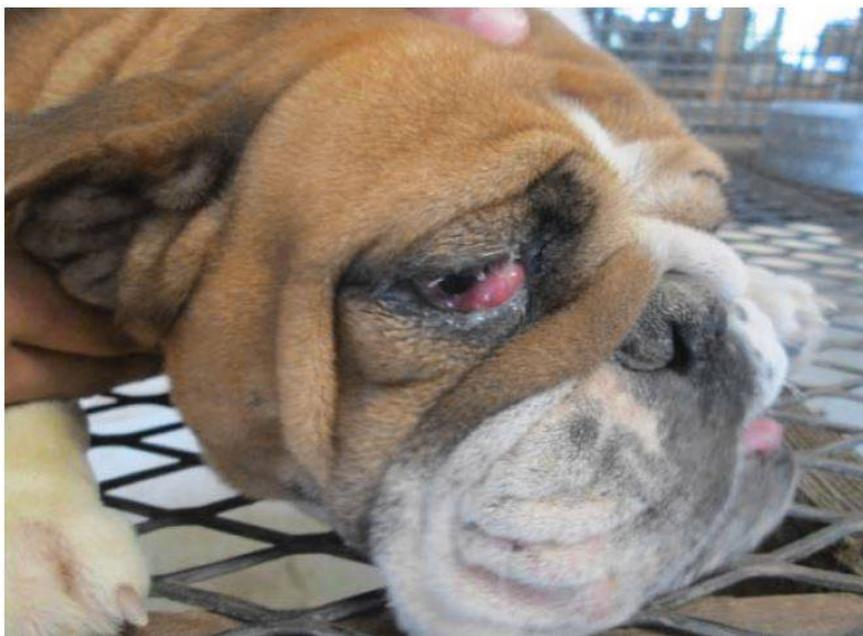
Vaccination programs alone can't prevent the array of veterinary problems prevalent in dogs at puppy mills. The health impacts of overcrowding, filthy conditions and lack of basic oversight can be traced directly to the housing and husbandry conditions common in large-scale commercial breeding operations. Wire floors injure paws, high ammonia levels lead to breathing problems, and the lack of sanitation results in pathogens that are very difficult to permanently eradicate. Caging setups designed to require the most minimal hands-on care possible often lead to treatable injuries or infections becoming severe or even deadly.

Stronger, clearer humane standards and better oversight of large-scale commercial breeders are necessary to help prevent this suffering.



Common veterinary issues

- Infectious diseases that can be deadly, such as parvovirus, campylobacter and canine distemper.
- Intestinal parasites (giardia, coccidia, worms).
- Respiratory issues (bronchial infections, pneumonia, etc.).
- Skin disorders such as mange.
- Ear problems, such as infections and mites.
- Hypoglycemia, aka low blood sugar.
- Brucellosis.
- Congenital defects, such as skeletal disorders (hip, elbow or knee dysplasia), hernias, liver disease (liver shunts), heart issues (murmurs or heart disease), eye issues (cherry eye, cataracts, blindness).



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