Points on Pets: Tattoos can help connect lost dogs with owners

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: We are wondering if we can have our dog tattooed with our telephone number so that if he gets away from us we can be easily contacted. Reading a tattoo might be easier and quicker than taking him to a shelter or veterinary office to have an implanted microchip read. He does not like to wear collars.

A: Depending on the size and temperament of your dog, a tattoo can probably be quickly and painlessly applied on the hairless inner portion of his ear or on the hairless area inside his groin. Most veterinarians and animal shelter workers look for tattoos on stray animals.

It is true that most dogs are reunited with their owners because they are wearing collars with identification tags, rabies vaccination tags, or city or county tags. Therefore, having your dogs properly vaccinated and licensed will not only protect them from rabies, but will also help assure their safe return if lost.

Q: My veterinarian found a "bug" called "isospora" in our puppy's fecal sample during a routine examination while we had her at the clinic for her vaccinations. He prescribed a medication for us to give our dog over a three-week period. Because our puppy appears to be totally normal and has never vomited or had diarrhea we were surprised by the diagnosis. Is this a serious disease? Are we likely to get the disease from our puppy? Because this caught us by surprise we did not ask all of the questions we should have while in the clinic.

A: Isospora is the name of a species of a single-cell intestinal parasite commonly referred to as coccidia. The most common clinical sign seen in puppies with coccidia infections is a watery diarrhea containing blood. Because of the severe diarrhea, this disease can become life threatening in immature puppies that can rapidly become very dehydrated. Coccidia cause diarrhea by destroying the cells on the inner lining of the intestinal tract. Because older dogs have usually developed some immunity to coccidia, they do not show external signs of the disease when infected.

Infections due to coccidia can usually be readily diagnosed by veterinarians and their technicians by examining fecal samples under a microscope in the clinic's diagnostic laboratory. As you know, treatment for coccidia usually includes the administration of a coccidiostat over a two- or three-week period and supportive treatment to relieve the clinical signs of the disease if necessary. It is interesting that while the medications given to infected dogs do not actually kill the organisms, they greatly reduce the number of infective coccidia by stopping their reproduction and eventually normal puppies develop immunity to the disease. Most veterinarians do recommend treating dogs diagnosed with coccidia even if clinical signs are not seen at the time of diagnosis.

Since coccidiosis is contagious between dogs, all fecal droppings should be picked up and properly disposed of in a sanitary manner. Fortunately, isospora are not transmissible to people. You should ask your veterinarian about a complete wellness program for your new puppy.

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