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Hemangiosarcoma & Lymphoma

Hemangiosarcoma

Hemangiosarcoma (HSA) is one of two inherited cancers in the Australian Shepherd. (The other is lymphoma.) HSA, an aggressive cancer of the vascular tissue (blood vessels) is very common in the breed. It can form almost anywhere but tumors most frequently initiate in the spleen, heart, and occasionally the skin. Because it begins in a blood vessel it spreads readily, often to the lungs or liver.

Prognosis for dogs with HSA is a very poor, with most surviving only a few weeks or months after diagnosis. Sometimes the first indication that the dog is ill is a sudden catastrophic collapse. If any Aussie over 4 years that dies suddenly from no apparent cause may have died from HSA; if at all possible a necropsy should be done to verify whether or not HSA was the cause. The skin form, if caught early enough, may be cured by tumor removal. It is also the easiest type to treat with the longest survival time.

First-step relatives of affected dogs (parents, full and half siblings, and offspring) should be bred only to mates with pedigrees as clear of HSA as possible and who have no affected close relatives. If semen has been stored from a male that developed HSA it should be discarded.

Lymphoma

Lymphoma, sometimes called lymphosarcoma, is also inherited cancers in the breed. Lymphoma is a cancer of the white blood cells. It most frequently arises in the lymph nodes, spleen, or bone marrow. It can also start in the gastric system, skin, or thymus gland. The most common sign is an enlarged lymph node below the jaw or behind the stifle (knee.) Affected dogs often are lethargic, anorexic, lose weight, or have swelling of the legs or face. Occasionally they will drink and urinate frequently or have difficulty breathing, irritated patches on the skin or mouth, vomiting, or dark foul-smelling diarrhea.

Prognosis varies and is somewhat dependent on the specific form of lymphoma the dog has. Some forms respond better to chemotherapy though most dogs will relapse after a period of remission. With additional chemotherapy a second remission is usually possible, though of shorter duration than the first. Most dogs will eventually die of the disease.

First-step relatives of affected dogs (parents, full and half siblings, and offspring) should be bred only to mates with pedigrees as clear of lymphoma as possible and who have no affected close relatives. Any dog that has had lymphoma, even if it is in remission, should not be bred. If semen has been stored from an affected male it should be discarded.