Approximately six weeks ago, cases of Leptospirosis were reported at two of Fresno’s public dog parks – Woodward and El Capitan. At that time, the Valley Animal Center sent out information to our members regarding Leptospirosis and the cleaning protocols we have in place to ensure our dog park does not become contaminated with diseases such as this. These protocols include:

- Regular disinfecting of all hard surfaces in the park to include: walkways, run entrances, artificial turf, agility equipment, fence posts, drinking bowls, toy receptacles and all other concrete surfaces
- Meticulously monitoring chlorine levels of our pool to ensure all traces of bacteria and viruses are killed

After learning of nine confirmed cases of Leptospirosis in our area, dog park management instated additional safety precautions. This included removing kiddie pools and all portable water containers from the runs, increasing the frequency of disinfection, and the member screening process explained below.

Existing members were asked if they had visited either of the parks listed above, and if so, were instructed to quarantine their dogs for two weeks and not allow them back into the park during that time. In addition to this, incoming members were asked if their dog(s) had been to either of the parks and if they answered yes, their application was placed on hold for two weeks in order to observe their dog(s) for symptoms such as lethargy, loss of appetite, and depression.

On Thursday, August 13th, we signed up a new member to our dog park. Protocol was followed by our staff with the prospective member being asked if their dog had visited either Woodward or El Capitan dog parks. The member stated no, and we proceeded to sign them up. Yesterday evening, we received a phone call from the new member stating that the dog had tested positive for Leptospirosis after displaying symptoms on Thursday evening.
Please know that the dog did not contract Leptospirosis from the Dr. James W. Thornton Dog Park. The incubation period for Leptospirosis ranges from two days to three weeks. Because the dog began showing symptoms just hours after visiting our park, this indicates previous exposure. The owner acknowledged that they had taken their dog to El Capitan Dog Park previously but only for a short time and didn’t think this was significant information to disclose when filling out the membership packet.

This morning I contacted the Center for Disease Control, Local State Health Department and the Department of Infectious Diseases to notify them of this occurrence and seek guidance on what our next steps should be. Dr. Powers, DVM, from the Infectious Disease Department stated that we should close the dog park down for a week in order to sterilize the park without putting our member’s dogs at risk. Dr. Powers also assured me that there have not been any known cases of Leptospirosis found in a well maintained and chlorinated pool. We are taking all the proper precautions per the recommendation of Dr. Powers to guarantee our dog park remains a safe environment for all members and their canine companions. As such, effective immediately, the dog park will be closed until Wednesday, August 26 for deep cleaning.

Moving forward, the Dr. James W. Thornton Dog Park will be requiring a current Leptospirosis vaccine prior to entry for all current and prospective members. I have contacted Cedar Veterinary Hospital and their staff is more than willing to work with our members to provide the Leptospirosis vaccine series at a significantly discounted rate. I will know the pricing tomorrow and will immediately notify all members.

Please keep in mind the closing of the park is a precautionary measure. We are making all efforts to prevent the possible spread of this bacterial disease.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me via the information below or Taylor Dall-Angelo, Lead Dog Park Associate, at taylor.dallangelo@valleyanimal.org.

Thank you for your patience and understanding,

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