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Ithaca, NY July 11, 2008

Dear club members,

I am Dr. Susana Mendez, from the J.A. Baker Institute for Animal Health, at the Cornell Veterinary College, Ithaca, NY. One of my research lines is dedicated to Leishmania infections, with the final aim of developing a vaccine. Leishmania infections affect to many vertebrates, including humans and dogs. Human disease has a wide spectrum of manifestations, from localized ulcers to systemic disease, fatal if untreated. In dogs, leishmaniasis presents a variety of symptoms such as claws lengthening, weight loss, dandruff, enlargement of lymphatic nodes, nosebleed, ocular inflammation, and renal trouble that could ultimately cause their death. Treatments are effective for humans, although they are expensive and rather toxic. Treatment for dogs is currently unavailable in the US; moreover, even treated dogs commonly relapse. Furthermore, dogs can transmit the disease to humans.

The infection is not contagious and cannot be transmitted directly from one individual to another, but rather requires the presence of sandflies, which, like mosquitoes, are blood-sucking insects that feed on mammals at dusk. However, unlike mosquitoes:

- they do not reproduce near water, but in moist soil with decaying vegetation (not necessarily sand),
- they are a third of the size of a mosquito and can move through standard size insect screens,
- they do not suck blood but rather chew, causing a painful bite.

Recent studies have shown that, due to changes in weather patterns, the normal ranges of blood sucking insects have expanded, bringing insect-borne diseases to areas that were considered free before. As dog owners/breeders you are probably aware that the disease, once considered subtropical, is now present in Northern America. Besides the imported human cases (immigration, military personnel), surveys carried out by CDC and others have shown that leishmaniasis is present in dogs in, at least, 21 states and 2 Canadian provinces. This is a major health concern from both doctors and veterinarians..

My laboratory is currently undertaking a research project that aims to describe the presence of sandflies in NY State. I would to extend this study nationwide, because little is known about the fly's range in the US. If you have had cases of leishmaniasis, or you are interested in knowing what kind of biting insects you have around your kennel/home, I would like to ask for your help by setting sandfly traps in kennels and surrounding areas. These traps are very inexpensive, consisting on a piece of paper dipped in something sticky, such as castor or mineral oil, to be located inside the kennels, near trees, or buildings. After 24-48 hours, sheets should be collected and placed in a plastic bag, and shipped to us at no cost for you. Eventually, the identification of

the insects stuck to the paper would allow us to determine the presence of sandflies, what species they are feeding on, and if they are infected. The presence of other insects of medical importance (mosquitoes, midges, black flies) will be reported as well.

If you are interested on taking part on this project, please do not hesitate to contact me (by phone, regular or e-mail, see below) so I could provide more information.

Thanking your time and interest,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Susana Mendez', written in a cursive style.

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