

Orthopaedics
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Pulmonary Tumours

What are pulmonary tumours?

Pulmonary tumours are cancerous growths in the lungs of dogs and cats. They consist of primary tumours, which originate from the tissues in the lungs, or metastatic tumours, where the growth represents spread from a tumour located elsewhere in the body. In dogs, the average age at diagnosis is approximately 11 years and there are some breeds which are overrepresented like the Boxer, Doberman, Australian Shepherd, Irish setter and Bernese Mountain dog. The average age of cats with pulmonary tumours is 12 to 13 years. No breed or gender predisposition has been reported.

How is it diagnosed?

Most dogs and cats do not show symptoms of a pulmonary tumour until it is advanced. The first suspicion of a pulmonary tumour often arises when thoracic radiographs (X-rays) are taken for another reason. Sometimes, coughing or increased breathing rate or effort is present however, and leads to investigations being carried out. Usually one or more nodules are observed on x-ray. To confirm the diagnosis, a fine needle aspiration biopsy is usually necessary. If feasible, this procedure is performed under deep sedation or general anaesthetic to minimise risk of complications. If the lesion is located deep inside the chest, a CT-guided biopsy might be necessary. CT scan of the chest is also helpful for planning surgical removal and ruling out tumour metastases (spread). The sample(s) obtained are then examined at a laboratory to determine if cancer cells are present.

What treatment is possible?

The treatment of choice for primary pulmonary tumours is surgical removal. Surgical approach depends on tumour size and location. It usually involves lung lobectomy (this means opening the chest and removing an entire lung lobe). This is sufficient in many cases, however further treatment with chemotherapy might be advised for tumours which appear more aggressive on analysis. If the tumour is too advanced and surgery is either not elected or advised, medical treatment may be advised to improve quality of life, and slow cancer progression. The main options are either tyrosine kinase inhibitors (which are tablets) or injectable chemotherapy. Please refer to our chemotherapy brochure for further information.

What is the prognosis?

Prognosis depends on the size of the tumour, its location, presence of metastases (spread) and tumour subtype. Pulmonary tumours tend to be more aggressive in cats, hence in this species the prognosis is often more guarded. For tumours that can be removed, have not spread, and are not of an aggressive subtype the expected survival would be 1.5-2.5 years. For tumours that have already spread or are more aggressive, the expected survival sadly can be just a few months.

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