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JAMAICA PLAIN, SAUGUS

Saugus puppy recovers after fighting off rare, deadly flesh-eating bacteria infection

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 2, 2013 06:16 PM

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(MSPCA-Angell)

Mugsy, bandaged up, looks out a window on the car ride home after surgery to remove nearly half of his intestines, which were infected.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A puppy from Saugus is recovering after an arduous month-long fight with an infection from a rare, deadly flesh-eating bacteria.

Meanwhile, the veterinarians who treated him say they remain puzzled as to how he contracted the bug, formally known as necrotizing fasciitis.

“This kind of infection is extremely rare,” said Roxanna Khorzad, a veterinarian who tended to the sick young dog in the emergency and critical care unit at the MSPCA-Angell Animal Medical Center in Jamaica Plain. “In fact I doubt I’ll

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see another case in my career.”

Over Memorial Day weekend in May, Mugsy, a six-month-old Shar Pei, fell ill.

Owner, Chuck Rees, noticed his puppy was suddenly lethargic and had bumps on his belly that resembled bee stings. A local veterinarian evaluated Mugsy and told his owner to take him to the MSPCA-Angell facility in JP.

There, a skin biopsy and blood culture analysis confirmed the pup had contracted the deadly bacteria, which is known to quickly spread from skin to muscle to bone.

The diagnosis stunned Khorzad.

“Not only was this dog incredibly sick – and already close to death – but he was suffering from an infection that is almost never seen in pets,” she said. “Every second counts in a diagnosis like this and, to be honest, I was not optimistic that he would recover.”

Mugsy only had a 20 percent chance of survival, said Khorzad. Some of his skin had already begun to die and the dog was in “terrible pain.”

Veterinarians gave Mugsy aggressive antibiotics treatment and high doses of pain medicine.

“The antibiotics appeared to be working because after a few days his skin began to clear and his energy level rose,” Khorzad said.

After a week of treatment, surgery was performed to remove some of the dead skin. Then, the dog’s owner took a bandaged Mugsy and some additional antibiotic home.

But, a couple weeks later, Mugsy stopped eating. His owner rushed him back to Khorzad and her team.

“I could feel a blockage in his intestines just by palpating with my hands, and I knew in that moment the infection was now so serious that Mugsy’s already slim chances of survival had grown smaller,” Khorzad recalled.

Veterinarians said they had two options at that point: try a risky surgery to

veterinarians said they had two options at that point: try a risky surgery to remove a portion of the dog's intestines or put Mugsy down.

"We had come so far at that point and I wanted to do whatever I could to try and save Mugsy," said Rees, the puppy's owner.

During a two-hour operation on June 22, surgeons removed 40 percent of Mugsy's intestines and tests showed the bacteria was no longer in his system.

"It was a giant weight lifted from my shoulders," recalled Rees.

More than a month later, Mugsy continues to recover at home.

"I'm so glad that Mugsy continues to improve and, all things considered, he should go on to have a long and very normal life," Khorzad said.

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(MSPCA-Angell)

A photo of Mugsy before he became sick.

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