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**CANINE FLU STORY OVERHYPED BY MEDIA, EXPERT SAYS**

**Blacksburg, VA** (September 29, 2005)—An internationally recognized expert on infectious diseases in greyhounds says recent media reports of a canine flu epidemic have “greatly inflated the significance” of the scientific paper on which the reports were based.

Dr. Brad Fenwick, Vice President for Research and Professor of Infectious Disease Pathobiology at Virginia Tech, has specialized in the study of disease in racing greyhounds. In a letter to greyhound tracks and kennel operators, Fenwick said there is no scientific basis for the “hysterical tone” of recent media reports. Fenwick wrote the letter at the request of the American Greyhound Council (AGC), an organization formed by track and kennel operators to promote greyhound health and welfare.

“There is no killer dog flu crisis in greyhound racing,” Fenwick wrote, “or outside it, for that matter.”

The media reports were triggered by a research paper published in the current issue of *Science Magazine* suggesting that a respiratory disease observed in greyhounds at several tracks since 2004 is closely related to the equine flu virus. The paper also raised the possibility that the canine flu could be transmitted to humans because it had crossed species from horses to dogs.

Contagious respiratory diseases among dogs are nothing new, and Fenwick said this one appears no more serious than common kennel cough. The vast majority of greyhounds exposed to the canine flu recover completely, with many not even requiring treatment, he said. Evidence shows that most of the dogs that become infected with influenza do not show any symptoms. Where rare fatalities have occurred, they have been due to bacterial complications arising from failure to treat soon enough or with the correct antibiotics.

What disturbed him most about the media reports, Fenwick said, was the suggestion that this canine flu could be transmitted from dogs to humans and that greyhounds or the industry are somehow responsible for the outbreak. It is possible, he said, that this virus was circulating undetected in the pet dog population for some time and only became recognized when it caused problems in the greyhounds, since even a mild respiratory disease is of special concern in a canine athlete.

“There has never been a single recorded instance where the disease was transmitted from a horse to a human,” he noted, “so it is irresponsible in the extreme to suggest that this should be a cause for concern among the general public or pet dog

owners.”

Fenwick advised industry members to take several steps to prevent the spread of any contagious diseases among greyhounds, including prompt consultation with qualified veterinarians, the use of appropriate antibiotics, more frequent checking and observation of dogs, extra cleaning and sanitation measures, and isolation of ill dogs away from healthy animals.

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