

RSPCA raid for killer dog virus

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THE RSPCA has raided a puppy factory in Victoria's east as part of an investigation into the source of a deadly disease outbreak in Melbourne pet stores.

The highly contagious canine parvovirus - which causes bloody dysentery and kills about half the dogs infected - has claimed the lives of at least six pups over the past two months from two pet store chains.

Vet records show three puppies from Pets Paradise stores have fallen ill with parvo in the past three months.

The first case was a cavoodle-cross puppy that died in early June, a week after purchase from Pets Paradise Southland. The second was a boxer puppy bought in late May from Pets Paradise at Eastland shopping centre and the third a German shepherd-cross puppy bought from Pets Paradise Southland in July.

Breeder Raymond Holmes, of Maffra, is under investigation by the RSPCA after being linked to at least one of the three puppies from the Pets Paradise shops that died.

The managing director of another pet store, Passion for Pets' Chris Blackwood, said seven puppies at his Carrum Downs store had been infected by a sick litter that arrived from Mr Holmes in mid-June. Three died.

Mr Blackwood said Passion for Pets had been decontaminated but it was more difficult for breeders to rid their facilities of the disease because the virus could last up to one year. He said when the first puppy had tested positive for parvo, "we just went into total shutdown and started isolating".

Mr Blackwood said as a result of the outbreak, Passion for Pets had stopped dealing with Mr Holmes, who had provided "about 30" puppies over the past six years.

RSPCA and council rangers raided Mr Holmes' property at Riverslea, near Maffra, on Friday, where the RSPCA executive manager of animal services, Helen Cocks, said, "it was suspected the parvo pups had come from".

She said the RSPCA had not found evidence of parvo, but had concerns that the cement flooring was cold and draughty in Mr Holmes' "puppy factory", which held about 30 dogs.

Wellington Shire manager Paul Holton confirmed no parvo had been detected at the site, registered for two years. When contacted yesterday, Mr Holmes said: "I don't know anything" and hung up.

Omar El-Hissi, legal counsel for Pets Paradise, said the stores did not deal with Mr Holmes, but refused to answer questions about when the relationship had been discontinued, saying: "We cannot release any further information regarding who the relevant breeders are due to the privacy legislation."

Mr El-Hissi said that all customers were provided with a health guarantee that required the customer to attend a vet within 48 hours of purchase.

"It is unfortunate that the puppy [purchased from Southland in May] passed away and we have, in good faith, despite the customer's failure to comply with the obligation to attend the vet for a check-up within 48 hours, refunded the full purchase price and subsequent veterinary expenses incurred and documented by the customer."

Epidemic-tracking website diseasewatchdog.org shows 24 cases of parvovirus have been reported by Victorian vets over the past three months.

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Vet records show three puppies from Pets Paradise stores have fallen ill with parvo in the past three months. *Photo: David Tease*

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