

OMHS ringworm outbreak: one month later

By Nathan Howes
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Last month, the Oakville & Milton Humane Society (OMHS) closed its doors to the public due to an outbreak of ringworm infection in its cat population.

Today, the shelter remains closed as staff and its resources continue to attempt to restrain the outbreak, while taking care of the animals and finding permanent homes for those that have been fostered and boarded, and are now ready for adoption.

"It's been a challenging time. We have learned a lot about disease control and there are many of the protocols that have been put in place during the outbreak that we will continue with once the shelter re-opens," said acting executive director Heather White. "We have always valued our dedicated volunteers and never more than now, as the shelter remains closed.

As for when the shelter could be ready to re-open, it's too early to tell. Best-case scenarios indicate it may be sometime in January 2012.

Since the ringworm is a fungus that can be passed from animals to humans, the OMHS wants to be certain that there is no ringworm fungus anywhere in the shelter, and that all animals are ready to move to their new homes.

The good news is the shelter is reporting that the affected animals are responding well to treatment, isolating animals that have tested positive



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE OAKVILLE & MILTON HUMANE SOCIETY

TREATMENT: Oakville & Milton Humane Society Supervisor of Animal Care Roxanne Johns and Genevieve Reisinger, dog behaviour co-ordinator, give an infected cat a lime sulfur bath. At right, while the treatment turns the fur yellow, it does fade over time. The solution used however costs \$50 per bottle.

or are suspected of being positive in a portable trailer. Staff members are working with animals to prevent cross-contamination between the trailer and the shelter.

The rising cost of the outbreak continues – environmental and animal testing is being carried out to ensure it will gradually re-open its doors.

"We need to know that we have completely

removed the fungus from the animals and the shelter and the only way to know that is by sending out samples to be cultured and returned," said Andrea Barker, manager of animal care.

While the infection is confined to the cats, the outbreak is having an affect on all of the animals in the shelter, as evident with the dogs.

Genevieve Reisinger, the OMHS dog behaviour co-ordinator, is working with staff to

improve the lives of the dogs, matching them up with play partners so they can have fun with another dog under Reisinger's supervision. Staff have been using lunch breaks, staying late and coming in early to ensure all the dogs get a walk on the shelter property or a play period with their partner each day.

One of the protocols that have been proven successful in other shelter environments as a preventative measure is to give lime and sulfur baths to all of the animals in the shelter on an ongoing basis. While helpful, a bottle of the solution costs approximately \$50, with one bottle needed to bathe four cats, or two small to medium-sized dogs.

Homeless cats that have been boarded or raised in foster homes are being made available for adoption through the shelter's partnerships with local pet supply stores, including PetSmart in Oakville, PetValue in Clarkson and Ruffins Pet Nutrition Centre in the Milton Mall.

Since closing, it has been able to find permanent homes for 30 cats, which, while lower than normal, is still sufficient for shelter staff. It continues to honour the animal control contract for the Towns of Oakville and Milton, housing stray animals and returning lost pets to their owners via veterinary clinics and boarding facilities in the area.

People can donate to help with costs — by mail, at the shelter or online at www.oakvillemiltonhumane.ca. All donations are tax deductible. The shelter is located at 445 Cornwall Rd.

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