I recently received a dog from a friend, but neither of us knows for sure if she was ever spayed. Occasionally my friend noticed this dog acted as though she may be receptive to a male dog. Besides surgery, is there any other way to tell if she has been spayed?

Yes, there are other ways to check to see if a bitch has been spayed without putting her through an abdominal surgery. However, exploratory surgery is the most definite way to check and actually see if there is all or any part of a reproductive tract still in place.

While sexual receptivity is a clue, sexual receptive behavior can be mimicked in a situation where there is a strongly dominant male and a submissive female.

One way to check if a bitch has functional ovaries during the time of “receptivity” is to look at the cells from the vaginal wall. This is done by simply taking a sterile swab and collecting a few cells to view under a microscope. If she has active ovarian tissue, the cells will look different than those from a bitch with no ovarian activity.

Another way to see if a bitch has been spayed is to test for a specific hormone. This hormone is often elevated in a spayed bitch because there are no ovarian hormones, which would normally keep this particular hormone suppressed to a lower level. This can be done by analyzing a small sample of blood.

Finally, there is a hormone that can be administered to a bitch by an injection, followed by taking a few blood samples. The injected hormone will increase ovarian activity, if it is present, and this activity will be documented when her blood is analyzed for other specific hormones. If there is no ovarian tissue then these other hormones will not be detected.

None of these procedures work perfect every time, but a combination of these tests may be helpful in detecting whether or not a bitch has been spayed which would then eliminate the need for an abdominal exploratory surgery.

This column is provided by the faculty of the OSU Boren Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital.

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