

What is Parvo?

By Kelly Poliquin

Canine parvovirus is a highly contagious disease among puppies and dogs. The virus targets rapidly dividing cells such as those found in the digestive tract. Most at risk are puppies less than 4 months of age, whose immune systems have not fully matured, and adult dogs that have not been vaccinated.

Parvo is spread easily by oral contact with the feces of an infected dog. Paws, fur, shoes, humans, etc. can serve as transport for the virus. Just a small particle of feces can contain enough of the virus to be transmitted to a dog. The virus can remain in the environment for an extended period of time, surviving extreme hot and cold conditions.

A puppy or dog that has contracted parvo may exhibit loss of appetite, lack of energy, depression, fever, vomiting, or severe diarrhea (which may or may not be bloody). While these symptoms could be caused by something other than parvo, it is important to get your pet to the vet immediately. Most puppy deaths from the disease occur 48 to 72 hours after the onset of these symptoms. The biggest concern is dehydration caused by vomiting and diarrhea, which can be deadly.

As of yet, there is no single drug treatment that will rid an infected dog of the virus. It is up to the animal's immune system to fight the battle. The best care that can be given is the administration of fluids to prevent dehydration, controlling vomiting and diarrhea, and treating any secondary bacterial infections that often occur in dogs with the disease. Areas that an infected dog came in contact with, such as crates, must be cleansed thoroughly with a mixture of 1 part bleach to 30 parts water. Bedding and food bowls must be thrown away to prevent further spreading.

So what can be done to prevent your puppy or dog from getting this horrible disease? Vaccination! A puppy will initially have a natural immunity given to them through their mother's milk, but this wears off quickly and before their own immune system is mature enough to fight infection. So, starting at 8 weeks, puppies are given a series of vaccinations until they are 20-22 weeks old. Until the series is completed, keep your puppy away from areas frequented by other puppies and dogs: parks, obedience school, puppy classes, etc. Never let them come in contact with another dog's feces. Adult dogs must also be vaccinated. They are given a booster every year. Certain breeds, such as Doberman Pinschers and Rottweilers, are more prone to parvo. Also, as a dog ages, its immune system gets weaker, leaving it more susceptible to disease and infection. Always check with your veterinarian to make sure your dog's vaccinations are up-to-date!

References:

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