

Parvovirus

Canine Parvovirus is a serious, highly contagious disease that affects the digestive system. It is most common in puppies.

How Dogs Get Parvovirus

Susceptible dogs are infected by swallowing the virus, which is found in the droppings of infected dogs. The virus is difficult to kill with ordinary disinfectants and can survive in the environment for years. People can inadvertently spread it on their hands, shoes, or inanimate objects.

Not every dog exposed to Parvovirus will get sick. Puppies, especially those that have not completed their vaccine series, are most vulnerable. Those born to mothers that were not vaccinated are at extremely high risk. Other factors that influence susceptibility include stress, genetics, parasite infection, and general health. Some breeds, such as Doberman Pinschers and Rottweilers, seem to be more likely to become seriously ill.

What the Disease Does

Parvovirus infects the bone marrow and lymph system, weakening the dogs immunity. It simultaneously destroys the lining of the intestinal tract, preventing absorption of water and nutrients. The damaged intestine can leak bacteria into the body. In newborns the virus also damages the heart. Signs of Parvovirus include fever, lethargy, loss of appetite, vomiting, bloody diarrhea, and dehydration. Dogs can die from dehydration or from bacteria in the bloodstream.

How Parvovirus is Diagnosed

Diagnosis begins with a physical exam but also includes laboratory testing of the feces. Other tests that can help the veterinarian treat the disease more effectively include a blood panel and a fecal test for parasites.

Treatment for Parvovirus

There is no specific treatment that kills the virus, but sick dogs are treated for secondary infections and to reduce the symptoms. Hospitalization is usually required. Treatment may include IV fluids to help with dehydration, IV electrolytes and nutrients, antibiotic injections, medications to control vomiting, and drugs that stimulate immunity. Up to 90% of puppies recover with treatment.

Preventing Canine Parvovirus

The key to preventing Canine Parvovirus is a good vaccination program. Puppies are vaccinated starting at 6-8 weeks of age and boosted every 3-4 weeks until the puppy is at least 16 weeks old. In highly susceptible breeds, boosters are given as old as 22 weeks of age. After that, vaccinations are given every 1-3 years depending on the type of vaccine. Its especially important for female dogs intended for breeding to be vaccinated. This allows them to provide immunity that protects their puppies until they are old enough to receive vaccinations.

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Adult dogs that have never been vaccinated before are given one or two vaccinations initially, followed by re-vaccination every 1-3 years. Ask your veterinarian about the best vaccination protocol for your dog.

Dogs with Parvovirus should be isolated from other dogs since the disease is highly contagious. Contaminated objects should be disinfected with a dilute bleach solution.

Because puppies that have not yet received their entire vaccination series are susceptible to Parvovirus, veterinarians recommend minimizing their likelihood of exposure. Avoid taking them to parks or other public, outdoor areas where soil may harbor the virus. If possible, choose puppy socialization and training classes that require the puppies to have started their vaccines. The classes should be held in places that are disinfected regularly. It is also preferable to avoid boarding very young pups.

Keeping your puppy healthy will reduce his susceptibility to Parvovirus. Be sure he receives regular veterinary checkups, gets all recommended vaccines on time, is treated to control parasites, and enjoys a healthy diet.

