

Understanding Canine Coronavirus Infections

Canine coronavirus is a disease that invades the intestinal tract and causes diarrhea in dogs. It is similar to parvovirus infection but usually causes milder symptoms. Disease caused by coronavirus alone occurs only in very young puppies. Most severe cases involve parvo and corona. Vaccines are available specifically for coronavirus; however, most Veterinary Schools are not including it as part of their core vaccine protocol. Dogs receive cross protection from corona when they are given the parvo vaccine. The coronavirus damages the intestinal villi, the finger-like projections on the wall of the intestines that move food through the body and absorb nutrients. Bloody diarrhea results that can be semi-formed to projectile liquid. Vomiting is uncommon, unlike in parvo infections. Protein and electrolyte loss, and dehydration are the biggest concerns for corona infected dogs. Corona can be complicated by other infections of parvo, hookworms, or giardia, making the symptoms much more severe.

Because corona is a virus, there is no specific cure for the disease. It must "run its course" over about 10 days. During this time, symptoms may be mild or transient. Supplemental electrolyte solutions such as pedialyte, and bland diets low in fat may help minor cases of diarrhea. For dehydrated, anorexic dogs, IV fluids are administered to replace water and electrolytes. Antibiotics may be used to prevent secondary bacterial infection of the intestinal tract.

The key to preventing coronavirus infection is eliminating exposure and proper vaccination strategies. Your veterinarian will decide whether to use the parvo vaccine alone or in combination with a corona specific vaccine. Sanitation and disinfection of areas soiled by sick pets should be thorough. The virus can continue to be shed in the stool for up to two weeks after all symptoms have subsided.