

CANINE PARVOVIRUS

Canine parvovirus is a serious, deadly threat to the unvaccinated dog population. It is so infectious that virtually anyone or any moving object can become a parvovirus carrier simply by coming into contact with an infected dog's saliva or feces (bowel movement). Most cases of parvoviral infection occur in dogs less than one year of age, although occasionally older dogs can be infected.

The virus is extremely hardy; it can survive searing heat and subzero temperatures for long periods of time. This means the virus might remain long after the fecal material is removed. People's shoes can pick up and carry the virus, as can the paws of other animals, domestic and wild.

Veterinarians recommend multiple parvovirus vaccinations for the growing puppy to establish protective immunity which can reduce the risk of the disease. Once correctly vaccinated and protected, the dog's immune system will generally protect the dog from infection.

What if your dog develops parvovirus?

See your veterinarian as soon as possible. Specific drugs are not available that will kill the virus itself, but medications and proven treatment procedures are available to help control the complications of the disease. Treatment generally includes withholding food and water until vomiting stops, fluid therapy, anti-nausea medications, and antibiotics (which are given to try to prevent and treat secondary bacterial infections, which are common due to the ulceration of the gastrointestinal tract allowing intestinal bacteria into the blood stream, as well as due to viral induced suppression of the immune system.) The death toll among parvovirus victims has been significantly reduced, particularly when it is promptly diagnosed and treated. However, many still die.

What are parvovirus symptoms?

Vomiting and severe diarrhea (often bloody) are usually accompanied by depression, loss of appetite, and possibly high fever (104-106 degrees--mainly only the first day or so). Loss of fluids through vomiting and diarrhea lead to rapid and often severe dehydration. Death is likely

without supportive care and treatment. Symptoms generally last about seven days.

What can you do to prevent parvovirus?

Here are a few tips:

- Be sure that your dog or puppy is properly immunized and that the immunization level is maintained by boosters. We recommend beginning vaccinations for puppies at six weeks of age.
- Minimize contact with other dogs or puppies and places frequented by other dogs until vaccinations are completed.
- If you suspect that you have walked through areas where dog feces were located (and even if the feces were promptly removed), wipe off the soles of your shoes with **one-part household bleach to thirty-parts water solution (about 4 ounces bleach to 1 gallon of water)**.
- Promptly remove any fecal material and disinfect the area with the bleach/water solution as a precaution.
- Use the bleach/water solution as part of a general cleaning process of areas frequented by other dogs until your puppy is vaccinated. Disinfectant is recommended of your premises if your dog does develop parvoviral infection to prevent spread to other dogs.

Can Humans catch it?

Neither humans nor other animals are affected by canine parvovirus; however, they often spread it by carrying the virus on their feet, shoes, and clothing.

There are now vaccines for long-lasting and effective immunization, and research continues on treatment procedures and medications. You may occasionally hear of new strains of canine parvovirus, as the virus has mutated several times since it was first discovered and started infecting dogs in the 1970's. Newer strains have been incorporated into the vaccines, but in general, the differences in the strains have been minor and immunization with one strain usually will protect against others. Prevention and early detection are the keys to fighting this deadly disease.