

Parvovirus in Dogs



What is parvovirus?

Parvovirus, or parvo is a disease of dogs that was first identified in the late 1970s. It affects the intestinal tract and causes severe vomiting, diarrhoea, fever and decreased ability to fight infection. It is especially severe in puppies, and puppies of any breed can die from this disease.

Dogs are infected by ingesting parvovirus-infected material. The virus multiplies in the intestinal tract, and up to a billion viral particles per teaspoon of faeces can be passed during an infection, and this is the main source of infection for susceptible dogs. The virus is very durable and persists in the environment for a minimum of 6 months. It is impossible to eliminate the virus from contaminated soil.



What you should know!



Can parvo be prevented?

YES!! The best approach to parvovirus is prevention through vaccination. Puppies should start a vaccination protocol at 6-8 weeks of age. Booster vaccinations are given at 12 and 16 weeks. **Puppies are not protected until 2 weeks after their 16 week vaccination.** Consequently, all puppies should be kept inside in a clean environment until this time. They should not be exposed to other dogs or environments until full protection is in place.



What are the symptoms of parvovirus?

Infection of puppies often results from exposure to contaminated soil. Signs of the disease usually occur from 4-14 days after exposure to the virus. Initially, signs include loss of appetite and a fever. Severe vomiting and blood streaked diarrhoea develop in 1-2 days, and these signs can quickly progress to dehydration and death. Parvo is most common in dogs less than a year of age that are unvaccinated, although dogs of all ages can be affected. Puppies that are 6-8 weeks old have a higher death rate than older dogs.



How is parvovirus treated?

There is no treatment to kill the virus once it infects the dog. However, the virus itself does not directly kill the dog. Rather, the damage the virus does to the intestinal tract and to some blood cells cause a range of very severe complications, including dehydration, electrolyte imbalances, and infection in the bloodstream, all of which can be fatal. The aim of treatment is to try to counteract these problems, which involves replacing fluids and balancing electrolytes by administering a balanced solution through an intravenous line, and administering antibiotics and anti-inflammatories to combat infection. The administration of blood products such as plasma may also be required depending on the severity of the disease.



What is the prognosis?

Prognosis is dependant on the severity of the disease, as well as the age of the infected animal. For puppies less than 10 weeks old, the prognosis is very poor, as generally they do not respond favourably to treatment and are usually more severely affected. The prognosis for older puppies and dogs, and animals with a milder infection is better, although infection can still be fatal. In the majority of cases, if the animal has not responded in 3-4 days, the prognosis is poor. Some breeds, such as the Rottweiler, Doberman and English Springer Spaniel have a much higher fatality rate than other breeds.



What are the costs involved in treating parvo?

Due to the nature of the infection and the severe damage it causes, intensive care for numerous days is often required. The time commitment for both nurses and vets to treat a parvo case is considerable, and medication and treatment protocols must be aggressive for treatment to be successful. Consequently, it is not uncommon for treatment to cost in excess of \$1,000.



Does parvo pose a risk to people or cats?

There is no evidence to indicate that parvovirus is transmissible to either humans or cats.

