

Parvovirus in Dogs

Understanding Canine Parvovirus: What Every Dog Owner Should Know

Canine parvovirus, often just called parvo, is a serious and highly contagious illness that can be fatal for dogs, especially for puppies and those who haven't been vaccinated. If you've got a furry friend at home, it's essential to be aware of this virus, its symptoms, and how to protect your pup.



What Is Parvovirus?

So, what exactly is parvovirus? It's a nasty little bug that attacks the cells in a dog's intestines, making it tough for them to absorb the nutrients they need. When a dog or puppy gets hit with this virus, they can quickly become weak and severely dehydrated. Unfortunately, many dogs diagnosed with parvo don't make it, which is why getting your dog vaccinated is so crucial.

Spotting the Signs of Parvovirus

If you're worried that your dog might have parvo, keep an eye out for these telltale signs:

- **Foul-smelling diarrhoea** that may contain blood
- Frequent **vomiting**
- A noticeable **loss of appetite**
- Sudden **collapse** or weakness
- Signs of **depression** or lethargy
- A **fever**
- In some heartbreaking cases, **sudden death** can occur.

Who's at Risk?

Puppies, especially those between six weeks and six months old, and unvaccinated dogs are at the highest risk for parvo. Young pups can deteriorate quickly, as the virus puts immense strain on their immune systems. They're also more vulnerable to secondary infections and dehydration.

Heads up: Outbreaks of parvo are more commonly seen in populated areas where many dogs



aren't vaccinated.

What Should You Do If You Suspect Parvo?

If you notice any of the symptoms mentioned above, don't hesitate—call your vet right away. Make sure to inform them about your dog's symptoms and if they've been around any dogs known to have parvo.

And remember, keep your pup away from other dogs, as this virus spreads easily.

Important: The sooner your dog receives treatment, the better their chances of pulling through.



How Does Parvo Spread?

Yes, parvo is highly contagious. It can spread rapidly among dogs, particularly those that aren't up to date with their vaccinations. The virus can be found in body fluids, especially in a dog's vomit and poop. What's alarming is that parvo can survive in the environment, like grass or dirt, for months, making it easy for your dog to come into contact with it while out on walks.

Even if your dog doesn't directly encounter an infected pup, they can catch the virus from contaminated objects like bedding, food and water bowls, or even your shoes and hands.

Note: It can take up to a week for your dog to show signs of infection after exposure.

How to Keep Your Dog Safe

Vaccination is your best line of defence against parvo. Here's the vaccination schedule for puppies:

- **First vaccine:** Between six and ten weeks of age.
- **Second vaccine:** Two to four weeks later.
- **Third vaccine:** Recommended for certain breeds, like Rottweilers or Dobermans, when they're older than 16 weeks.

- **Booster:** One year after the last vaccine, and then regular boosters throughout



their life.

Make sure you keep your dog's vaccination card handy. It will note when they received their shots and when the next ones are due.

What Happens If Your Dog Gets Parvo?

Unfortunately, there aren't any medications that can kill the parvovirus. Instead, treatment focuses on giving your dog the best chance to fight it off. Here's what your vet might recommend:

- **Hospitalisation:** Most dogs will need to stay at the vet for five to seven days for close monitoring.
- **Intravenous fluids:** This helps keep your pup hydrated.
- **Anti-nausea meds:** These can help control vomiting and prevent dehydration.

If your dog picks up a secondary infection due to their weakened immune system, they might also need antibiotics.

During treatment, it's crucial to isolate dogs with parvo to prevent the virus from spreading. Vets will wear special clothing and shoes when treating them, ensuring that they don't bring the virus back into the clinic.



What's the Prognosis?

The quicker you spot symptoms and seek treatment, the better your dog's chances of survival. Sadly, some dogs, especially puppies, may not survive, with most deaths occurring within 48 to 72 hours after symptoms begin. Plus, treatment can be costly, often requiring an extended stay in intensive care. That's why regular vaccinations are so important!

Recovery from Parvovirus

If your dog is one of the lucky ones to pull through, they'll need some extra TLC during their recovery. Your vet will provide specific instructions on how to care for them at home.

Even after they seem better, your dog may still be contagious. It's important to keep them away from other dogs and public places for a while—definitely check with your vet for guidance on when it's safe to socialise again.

Can Humans Get Parvovirus?

The good news is that humans can't catch parvovirus from dogs. However, you can inadvertently spread it from one dog to another on your clothes or hands. There is a human version of parvovirus, but it's a different strain altogether, and you can't pass it to your dog.

By staying informed and vigilant, you can help keep your dog safe and healthy from parvovirus. Regular vet check-ups and vaccinations are your best tools in preventing this dangerous disease!