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Canine Parvovirus

Parvo is a canine virus that causes severe inflammation and the eventual death of the small intestine. This, in turn, leads to the vomiting and diarrhea commonly associated with the disease. The virus is found worldwide and can infect dogs of all ages. The most commonly affected are puppies.

While very contagious between dogs and other members of the canine family, the parvovirus does not pass to other animal species or humans. Most commonly, the disease is spread between dogs by ingestion of infected feces. Parvo can be shed in stool for up to 2 weeks and is stable in the environment for years. Areas that have been exposed should be clean from fecal material and disinfected using a dilute bleach solution.

Once inside the body, the virus begins to attack the lining of the small intestine. Vomiting and bloody diarrhea soon follow. This then leads to dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, toxic shock, and secondary bacterial infections. When left untreated, this virus is usually fatal.

Puppies can be exposed to parvo and not show any signs of illness for as much as 5 to 11 days later. Vomiting is usually the first sign, with blood streaked, watery diarrhea occurring within 24 to 72 hours later. Other signs include fever, lack of appetite, weakness, listlessness, and rapid dehydration. In some cases death can occur as quickly as 2 days after initial signs.

An in-hospital ELISA (Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay) test of a suspected pet's feces is commonly used to help veterinarians diagnose parvo. Treatment should be started immediately on positive animals to insure the best prognosis. Intensive care therapy is required and may include intravenous fluid therapy for dehydration, antibiotics to prevent and treat secondary bacterial infections, potassium to aid in electrolytic balance, and anti-vomiting medication. Also beneficial is the administration of a parvovirus vaccine. This virus is unique because a vaccine that is given during the course of the illness can actually help the body to fight it. Hospitalization may be required for as long as 4 to 8 days or longer. The prognosis depends upon the severity of infection and promptness of treatment.

Puppies can receive some protection against parvovirus from their mothers if she was vaccinated prior to giving birth. However, this immunity is weak and does not last. It is necessary to vaccinate puppies with a modified live form of the virus at the age of 6 to 8 weeks. Booster shots must then be given every 3 weeks until the dog is 16 to 18 weeks of age. Thereafter an annual vaccine is needed to maintain protective immune levels. While the vaccine is not 100% effective, it is currently your pet's best chance of

staying healthy. As an added precaution, puppies should be restricted from interacting with other dogs until they have been fully vaccinated.

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