Associated Veterinary Specialists, PC, LTD
12462G Natural Bridge Road
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Parvovirus

Canine parvovirus is a highly contagious and serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the gastrointestinal tract of dogs. This virus also has the ability to attack the heart and bone marrow.

This virus is highly contagious and is spread by direct dog-to-dog contact via contaminated feces, in the environment and carried on people. It is resistant to heat, cold, humidity and drying and can survive in the environment for long periods of time. It can be transmitted from place to place on the hair or feet of dogs or via contaminated cages, shoes or other objects.

All dogs are at risk, but puppies less than four months old and dogs that have not been vaccinated against canine parvovirus are at increased risk of becoming infected and ill.

Clinical signs of dogs infected with parvovirus included, but are not limited to the following:

-Lethargy

-Loss of appetite

-Fever

-Vomiting

-Severe, bloody diarrhea

Most deaths associated with parvovirus occur within 48 to 72 hours following the onset of clinical signs. If you pet is shows any of these signs, please contact your veterinarian immediately.

Parvovirus is diagnosed based on history, clinical signs and laboratory tests. Fecal testing can confirm the diagnosis.

No specific drug is available to kill the virus in infected dogs, so the treatment for parvovirus is aimed towards supportive care. Treatments should be started immediately may include fluid therapy to correct dehydration and replace electrolytes, antibiotics to prevent secondary infections and anti-nausea and anti-diarrheal medications to combat vomiting and diarrhea. When a dog develops parvo, treatment can be expensive, and the dog may die despite aggressive treatment. Early recognition and aggressive treatment are very important in successful outcomes.

Since parvovirus is highly contagious, isolation of infected dogs is necessary to minimize the spread of the infection. It is essential to make sure the environment is cleaned properly. This virus is not easily killed and your veterinarian should be consulted to discuss specific cleaning and disinfecting agents.

How is parvovirus prevented?

The most important ways to prevent parvovirus include vaccination and good hygiene.

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Vaccination is extremely important. Young puppies are very susceptible to infection, particularly because the natural immunity provided in their mothers' milk may wear off before the puppies' own immune systems are mature enough to fight off infection. If a puppy is exposed to canine parvovirus during this gap in protection, it may become ill. An additional concern is that immunity provided by a mother's milk may interfere with an effective response to vaccination. This means even vaccinated puppies may occasionally be infected by parvovirus and develop disease. To reduce gaps in protection and provide the best protection against parvovirus during the first few months of life, a series of puppy vaccinations are administered. Puppies should receive a dose of canine parvovirus vaccine between 14 and 16 weeks of age, regardless of how many doses they received earlier, to develop adequate protection.

To protect their adult dogs, pet owners should be sure that their dog's parvovirus vaccination is up-to-date. Ask your veterinarian about a recommended vaccination program for your canine companion.

In spite of proper vaccination, a small percentage of dogs do not develop protective immunity and remain susceptible to infection.

Until a puppy has received its complete series of vaccinations, pet owners should use caution when bringing their pet to places where young puppies congregate (e.g. pet shops, parks, puppy classes, obedience classes, doggy daycare, kennels, and grooming establishments). Reputable establishments and training programs reduce exposure risk by requiring vaccinations, health examinations, good hygiene, and isolation of ill puppies and dogs. Contact with known infected dogs and their premises should always be avoided.

Finally, do not let your puppy or adult dog to come into contact with the fecal waste of other dogs while walking or playing outdoors. Prompt and proper disposal of waste material is always advisable as a way to limit spread of canine parvovirus infection as well as other diseases that can infect humans and animals. Dogs with vomiting or diarrhea or other dogs which have been exposed to ill dogs should not be taken to kennels, show grounds, dog parks, or other areas where they will come into contact with other dogs. Similarly, unvaccinated dogs should not be exposed to ill dogs or those with unknown vaccination histories. People who are in contact with sick or exposed dogs should avoid handling of other dogs or at least wash their hands and change their clothes before doing so.

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Reference: American Veterinary Medical Association