



Parvovirus

Parvo is one of the most common infectious diseases of young dogs. It is caused by a very tough virus that invades the small intestine. Symptoms include depression, large amounts of foul-smelling diarrhea (sometimes with blood), vomiting, not eating and then the rapid onset of dehydration. This disease can be fatal in dogs of any age, but puppies can be much harder to save.

Parvovirus spreads through fecal matter. Dogs of any age, breed, and sex are susceptible, but unvaccinated or undervaccinated puppies between the ages of 6 weeks and 6 months are the most susceptible and the least able to fight it. Parvovirus can remain in the environment for 7 months or more. Any infected area should be disinfected with a 5 % bleach/water solution and only vaccinated adult dogs should be allowed in the immediate environment. Another puppy should not be placed in the same environment.

The diagnosis of parvo is based on clinical signs, age of the dog, vaccination status, and response to treatment. There is a test to diagnose parvo, but it can give false positive and false negative results.

Treatment for parvoviral infection includes IV fluid therapy, antibiotics, medication for vomiting, pain management, and resting the digestive tract to allow it to heal. It is up to the dogs own immune system to clear the virus. Dogs that recover are sent home with a bland diet and other medications. These dogs should still be separated from other dogs for the next 2 weeks because they may still be contagious.

The best way to prevent this disease is through vaccination. Lack of vaccination or incomplete vaccinations are important factors in the development of parvo. Puppies need multiple vaccinations at 3 week intervals, usually beginning at 6 weeks of age and continuing until at least 16 weeks of age. Dogs that survive parvo infection may have lifelong immunity. Some breeds, Rottweilers, Dobermans and Pit Bulls are genetically more at risk for this disease, are more difficult to treat and may not develop good immunity from normal vaccinations.