



Infectious Hepatitis (Adenovirus) in Dogs

Overview

- Infectious hepatitis (also known as canine adenovirus and Rubarth's Disease), affects the liver and other major organs.
- Dogs can catch infectious hepatitis from an infected dog, from going somewhere an infected dog has been or touching something an infected dog has touched.
- Young, unvaccinated dogs are most at risk of catching infectious hepatitis.
- Protect your dog by regularly vaccinating them against infectious hepatitis.

What is Infectious hepatitis?

Infectious hepatitis is a virus that attacks the liver, blood vessels, immune system, kidneys, eyes, lungs, and heart. Symptoms vary depending on which organs are affected. Infectious hepatitis spreads in bodily fluids i.e. urine,





stools and saliva. Most dogs catch infectious hepatitis from an infected dog, or from going somewhere an infected dog has been. **Vaccinate your dog to protect them from infectious hepatitis.**

Symptoms

If your dog has caught infectious hepatitis, their symptoms will vary depending on how the virus affects them, and which organs it attacks. A mild case may only cause slight symptoms for a few days, but a severe case can cause as a whole range of symptoms. Symptoms in mild cases:

- [Low energy \(lethargy\)](#)
- [Eating less/off food completely](#)
- Drinking less
- [Coughing](#)
- [Vomiting](#)
- [Diarrhoea](#)

More severe cases can show a wide range of symptoms including:

- Pale or yellow gums
- High temperature (fever)
- Small red dots on gums or skin
- Bruises
- Bloody vomit or diarrhoea
- A painful/swollen belly
- Unsteadiness / [seizures/fits](#)
- Sudden death
- Cloudy blue eyes (after infection)

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet if your dog has any of the symptoms of infectious hepatitis, particularly if they are young or unvaccinated. **You know your dog - if they don't have the symptoms listed, but you are still concerned, it's always best to contact your vet.**



Diagnosis

Your vet might suspect infectious hepatitis if your puppy/dog is unvaccinated and has the symptoms above. They may need to run some tests, such as blood tests and an ultrasound scan, to confirm their suspicions.

Treatment

There is no specific medicine to treat hepatitis, unfortunately, antibiotics don't work because it's caused by a virus not a bacteria. Instead, your vet will support your dog while he/she fights the virus:

- **Intensive nursing and feeding.** Your dog may need intensive nursing (in a veterinary hospital) to keep them clean, warm, fed and hydrated. If your dog can't or won't eat, they may need to be fed through a stomach tube. They will also need to be isolated from other dogs to prevent them from picking up any other infections and stop infectious hepatitis spreading.
- **A fluid drip.** Your dog will need a fluid drip (fluids given straight into the blood stream) to replace the fluids they lose in their diarrhoea/vomit and to stop them becoming dangerously dehydrated.
- **A blood transfusion.** In some cases, your dog may need an emergency blood transfusion.
- **Other medications.** Other medications such as anti-sickness or anti-seizure medication may be necessary depending on your dog's symptoms.

Outlook

A dog with a mild case of infectious hepatitis has a good chance of surviving if they receive rapid treatment from a vet. A dog with a more severe infection is much less likely to survive and sadly, dogs with severe infections often die quickly or need to be [euthanased \(put to sleep\)](#) to stop them from suffering.

Vaccination

Dogs that survive infectious hepatitis are often a risk to other dogs for a long time because they shed the virus in their urine for 6-9 months after recovery. The hepatitis virus can also survive in the environment for months. For this



reason, it's very important to have your dog [vaccinated regularly](#) to keep them protected from this invisible threat.

Taking an unvaccinated puppy outside

An unvaccinated puppy, or a puppy that has only had their first injection, doesn't have any protection against infectious hepatitis or the [other diseases we vaccinate against](#). Your puppy will be safe to go out for a walk and meet other dogs one - two weeks after they complete their first vaccination course, until then:

- **Home and garden.** Your puppy is safe to go into your garden as long as no unvaccinated dogs have visited recently.
- **Public places.** You can take your puppy out into public but carry them and don't put them down onto the ground.
- **Puppy classes.** As long as your puppy is healthy it's okay to enrol them in a puppy class. The benefits far outweigh the very small risk of catching parvovirus from another puppy.

Cost

Treatment for infectious hepatitis can become very expensive, especially if your dog needs intensive care in a veterinary hospital. It's very important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your dog. There are often several treatment options so if one doesn't work for you and your pet then the vet may be able to offer another. Consider [insuring your dog](#) as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start. This will ensure you have all the support you need to care for them. Remember, you can prevent illness such as hepatitis by keeping your dog up to date with their vaccinations.

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