



Parvovirus in dogs and puppies

Overview

Parvovirus (parvo) is a nasty virus that attacks the lining of the intestines in puppies and dogs. It causes severe diarrhoea, vomiting and illness.

Parvo is a serious disease and if it's not treated quickly it can cause death.

It is extremely contagious between dogs but fortunately, humans can't catch it.

Parvo is still fairly common in the UK and there are often outbreaks in areas with lots of dogs.

PDSA Pet Hospitals see nearly 1,500 cases of parvo each year.

Puppies are particularly susceptible but it can affect unvaccinated dogs of any age. Thankfully your vet can vaccinate your puppy to protect them from parvo.

Regular vaccinations will be needed through your dog's life to ensure that they remain protected.

Symptoms of parvo in dogs

Parvo is a serious disease that causes very sudden and serious illness, symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Foul smelling, watery, bloody diarrhoea
- Less or no interest in food
- Extreme tiredness

- Your dog may feel hot (or sometimes cold) to touch

Survival rate of parvo

The majority of dogs survive parvo if they are treated quickly but without treatment, the vast majority of dogs unfortunately die from parvo.

Treatment from a vet is essential because dogs with parvo find it almost impossible to get better on their own.

Sadly, because it's such a nasty disease, some dogs can die from parvo even if they have been treated very quickly. Puppies are particularly at risk and can quickly deteriorate and die of dehydration or secondary infections.

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet immediately if you notice any of the symptoms above, or if you are worried that your dog may have parvo.

If your dog has had contact with another dog with parvo but has no signs of being poorly you will need to keep a very close eye on them developing any signs. Contact your vet if you are worried.

When you visit the vets, keep your dog in the car or wait outside to help prevent the spread of parvo to other unvaccinated dogs.

You know your dog best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

How did my dog get parvo?

Parvo is very contagious and the virus spreads in dog poo. Common places for a dog to catch parvo include:

- Another infected dog
- Poo from an infected dog
- Something that has come into contact with the virus e.g. collars and leads, floors, food and water bowls, shoes, clothes, hands.

Parvovirus can live in the environment for over a year and needs to be killed with a special disinfectant. This means if a parvovirus-infected poo has been cleared away but the virus is left on the ground, it can infect a dog that comes into contact with it.

It can take around 3-7 days for dogs to show symptoms of parvo after catching it.

Treatment for parvovirus

There is no specific drug to treat parvo, treatment in the hospital can include:

- **Intensive nursing support**
Nursing will help them fight the virus. They will usually be kept in isolation to stop the disease spreading to other dogs. Dogs with parvo often need to stay in a veterinary hospital for several days before they are well enough to go home.
- **A drip to give lifesaving fluids**
Dogs with parvo get very dehydrated because they lose so much fluid in their diarrhoea and vomit. A drip helps to replace these fluids.

- **Antibiotics**
Dogs with parvo have a damaged immune system and are at risk of picking up other nasty bugs. Antibiotics are used while they recover from parvo to help protect them from other infections.
- **Anti-sickness medicine**
- **Medicines to prevent stomach ulcers**
- **Liquid food given through a tube placed into their tummy**

Sadly, some dogs don't survive parvo even with veterinary treatment.

Parvo can take a long time to recover from and can be an extremely expensive condition to treat.

Vaccination and pet insurance are two of the most important things to consider when getting a dog.

Ongoing care

If your dog improves enough to return home, they will need careful nursing to make sure they keep getting better.

Below are some tips on how to care for your dog while they recover from parvo:

- Ensure they are drinking little and often to prevent them becoming dehydrated.
- Feed them small, bland meals throughout the day; your vet will advise which food is best.
- Make sure they get lots of rest; walks won't be necessary until they are feeling much better.

- Make sure they have access to your garden or somewhere else they can go to the toilet – they may need to go more regularly than usual.
- Keep them away from other dogs and public spaces – it's very important to help stop the spread of parvovirus. Your dog can be infectious for a few weeks after recovery.

How to prevent parvo in dogs and puppies

Buy or rehome a puppy responsibly

If you are getting a puppy, make sure you buy from a responsible breeder or reputable rehoming centre. Ensure you see the puppies with their mum, and that she has also been vaccinated. Puppies should be healthy and bright, and not showing any signs of diarrhoea.

Regular vaccination

Vaccination (jabs/shots) is the best way to prevent your dog from getting parvo. Adult dogs need boosters regularly throughout their life – speak to your vet for more information about vaccinations.

Parvovirus sticks around

If you have lost a dog to parvo, remember that the virus can survive in the soil and home environment for up to a year. Any new dogs or puppies coming into your home need to be fully vaccinated. Dogs that have recovered from parvo can spread the virus for several months afterwards. Keep them away from other dogs or areas where lots of dogs go, like local parks.

Your vet can test to see if your dog is still carrying the virus.

Taking puppies out and about before their vaccines are complete

“When can we go out for our first walk?” – This is a very common question for a vet to be asked about a new puppy.

Before your puppy has had their vaccinations (jabs) we advise:

- Don't put them on the floor or walk them in public spaces, i.e. parks and streets. Carrying them is fine.
- Keep them away from unvaccinated dogs (vaccinated dogs and other healthy puppies are a small risk but are generally considered to be quite safe).
- Toilet train them in the garden – there is a very small risk of catching diseases in your garden but it is generally accepted to be fairly safe.
- Socialise your puppy to help them become friendly and outgoing.

You can take your puppy out for a walk and to meet other dogs 1-2 weeks after they have had all of their vaccinations (jabs). Speak to your vet for more information.

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