

Distemper in dogs

Overview

- Distemper is a disease caused by a virus. The virus spreads easily between dogs.
- It causes a wide range of symptoms including a cough, runny eyes and nose, diarrhoea, high temperature, thickened pads, tremors and fits.
- Many dogs will not survive distemper and sadly, some become so poorly they have to be put to sleep.
- Vaccination has meant we now rarely see distemper in the UK, but it does still occur in areas with many unvaccinated dogs.
- **Vaccination is an excellent way to protect your dog from distemper.**



Vaccinate your dog against distemper.

What is distemper in dogs?

Distemper is a virus that spreads easily between unvaccinated dogs. The virus spreads in the air, via bodily fluids (such as urine and saliva), and can live in the environment where an infected

dog has been. Young dogs are most at risk of catching distemper.

The distemper virus attacks several different organs in the body – the guts, heart, immune system, lungs, brain and nerves. It causes a variety of symptoms ranging from mild cold-like signs to seizures and death.

Symptoms

The symptoms of distemper vary a lot depending how much resistance (immunity) the infected dog has, and which organs are affected. Dogs can show any combination of the symptoms listed below over a few weeks:

- High temperature (fever)
- Runny eyes and nose (first watery then pussy)
- Low energy (lethargy)
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Thickened paw pads and nose (hard pad)
- Coughing
- Tremors
- Paralysis
- Fits and seizures



Distemper virus causing weepy eyes in a dog.

Usually distemper symptoms start with runny eyes, a cough, and diarrhoea, after 3-4 weeks hard pads, hard nose and neurological signs (fits, tremors, seizures) develop. Some dogs die during the early stages of distemper, but others are poorly for several weeks and can eventually recover.

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet if your dog starts showing any of the symptoms above, especially if they haven't been vaccinated.

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.

Treatment

There is no treatment available to kill the distemper virus. Instead, your vet will use medicines to reduce symptoms and supportive care to help your dog fight the virus. It can take several weeks to recover. Sadly, some dogs die in the early stages of distemper or are left with permanent brain damage. Some dogs become so poorly that they have to be put to sleep.

Ongoing care

Your vet will advise you what you will need to do to nurse your dog back to health. Once your dog has had distemper they may suffer relapses and problems throughout life.

Survival chances

It's impossible to say whether your dog will survive distemper. Sadly, sometimes they become so poorly, putting them to sleep is the only option.

Prevention

Fortunately, distemper is easy to prevent with vaccination - have your puppy vaccinated before you let him / her mix with other dogs or go out into public spaces. Booster vaccinations will then keep your dog safe from distemper throughout their life.

Distemper is much rarer than it used to be in the UK, but an unvaccinated puppy is still at risk of getting distemper today.

Cost

Treatment for a poorly pet can become very expensive. 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.

It's also 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.

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