

Parvovirus – Fact Sheet

Parvovirus is a highly infectious agent restricted to members of the Dog family. It first appeared world wide in 1978, apparently having mutated from a parvovirus affecting another species.

It primarily affects the gut wall, with fever, bloody diarrhoea and vomiting being the most consistent features.

The virus is incredibly resistant to environmental effects, and can persist in soil etc for years. Only the strongest disinfectants will kill it. Strong bleach or chlorine work, but must reach everywhere to get it all.

Signs seen after exposure.

Days 1 to 5 or 7 – nothing.

This is the incubation period, and there will be no clinical signs evident. The patient will be infectious to others during this period.

Around days 5 to 7 after exposure. Developing lethargy and fever. No specific signs yet, could be any infection developing. If closely monitored, the temperature may rise above 40 degrees.

1 to 2 days later. Full clinical signs develop, including vomiting and bloody diarrhoea (often appearing like blackberry jam). The virus attacks the gut wall, causing it to fall apart leaving raw bleeding surfaces. Death through dehydration, pain and toxemia follows rapidly. The diarrhoea is rich in virus particles.

* In 1978 when parvovirus first appeared there was a second form affecting only puppies. This form simply killed them suddenly without warning by affecting their heart muscle. This form mysteriously disappeared soon after*

Treatment

Symptomatic only. Intravenous fluids, antibiotics, pain control and warmth. Treatment needs to be maintained for 3 to 5 days. Cost of this treatment would be between \$500 and \$1,000 without complications.

Without treatment, mortality (death rate) will be over 95%. With intensive treatment and a patient without other condition, mortality will be approximately 25 – 30%. Unfortunately, some of these deaths can occur towards the end of the treatment meaning the costs will have already been incurred.

Prevention

Vaccination is highly effective against parvovirus. It is essential that the nature of vaccination is understood as some clients have been misinformed regarding vaccination.

Vaccination takes 10 – 14 days to have any effect. The vaccine shows the body what the virus “looks like”, and therefore teaches its immune system to attack any future virus. This takes 10 – 14 days to occur, and boosters further increase the “reaction”. Boosters have an effect within 7 days as the system is already “primed”.

Vaccinating dogs already exposed to parvovirus is actually likely to be more of a problem than not doing so, as it simply competes with the immune system.