

What is Parvo?

Parvovirus is a viral disease in dogs. It affects puppies much more frequently than it affects adult dogs. The virus grows in rapidly dividing cells such as those in the intestinal lining. The virus attacks and kills these cells, causing diarrhea (often bloody), depression and suppression of white blood cells -- which come from another group of rapidly dividing cells. In very young puppies it can infect the heart muscle and lead to death. This disease is very serious and there is only about a 40% survival rate. If your puppy has not received all his/her vaccinations, you should not take him/her anywhere other than your house and yard. Two weeks after your puppy's last vaccination, you can start taking him/her to other places.

Parvovirus Vaccine

Parvovirus is probably the most common viral illness of dogs at the present time. It is much more common in puppies than it is in adult dogs. Usually, adult dogs will not contract this virus unless they never received their puppy vaccinations, have not been vaccinated as an adult, or have a significantly lowered immune system. To successfully immunize a puppy against parvo, it is a long process. Many vets recommend vaccinating puppies every three to four weeks for this virus starting at 6 - 8 weeks of age and continuing until they are at least 16 weeks of age and preferably 20 weeks of age. Yearly vaccinations for this disease are needed to ensure immunity.

What are the symptoms of Parvo?

Parvo is a virus that attacks the lining of the digestive system. It causes dogs and puppies to not be able to absorb nutrients or liquids. Puppies are especially prone to it because they have an immature immune system. When dogs and puppies contract parvo, they often have a high fever, significant diarrhea, vomiting and lethargy. Usually within 24 - 48 hours, they stop eating and drinking and have a bloody, foul-smelling, liquid stool. In many cases, dehydration, shock, and death follow.

How is Parvo transmitted?

Canine parvovirus is carried by dogs. Adult dogs may be infected carriers without showing any clinical signs. Dogs with the typical diarrhea that parvovirus causes shed the virus as well. Parvo virus can remain infectious in the ground contaminated with fecal material for as long

as 6 years and more than likely, longer. Generally, it takes 7-10 days from the time of exposure for dogs and puppies to start showing symptoms and to test positive for parvo. Parvo is highly contagious to unprotected dogs. Extremely hardy, most disinfectants cannot kill the virus, however chlorine bleach is the most effective and inexpensive agent that works and is commonly used by veterinarians. Parvo can be brought home to your dog on your shoes, clothes, hands and even car tires. It can live for many months outside of the animal. Any areas that are thought to be contaminated with parvo should be thoroughly washed with chlorine bleach diluted 1 ounce per quart of water or stronger. Rest assured that parvovirus is specific to dogs alone and cannot be transmitted to humans or other pets of a different species, such as cats.

How is Parvo treated?

Without intense treatment, the victims of parvo die of dehydration, blood loss, and loss of intestinal walls. Treatment generally consists of IV or subcutaneous fluids and antibiotics. *There is no cure.* Veterinarians can only treat the symptoms and try to keep the dog alive by preventing dehydration and loss of proteins. As there is no cure for any virus, treatment for parvo is mostly that of supporting the different systems in the body during the course of the disease. This includes giving fluids, regulating electrolyte levels, controlling body temperature and giving blood transfusions when necessary. Dogs who have survived parvo can get it again so make sure you keep your puppy in a sterilized area once he/she returns home. In the case of some puppies, a puppy testing negative for Parvo one day could succumb to the virus again within a matter of days. It strikes fast and without mercy.

Will my dog die if he/she gets Parvo?

This is a very serious disease. Some puppies infected with parvovirus will die despite prompt and adequate treatment. While no extremely accurate statistics are available, a good guess is probably that 40% of puppies treated for parvovirus will live. Without treatment, probably 90% or more of the infected puppies will die. Due to the high death rate, parvovirus gets a lot of free publicity. Many people just assume that any case of diarrhea in a dog is from parvovirus. This is not true. There are a lot of other diseases, parasites, and disorders that lead to diarrhea. If you have a puppy, don't take any chances. Have your puppy examined by your vet if diarrhea is a factor in any disease. It is better to be safe than to be sorry.

If your dog becomes infected with parvovirus and makes it through the first three to four days, there is a higher chance that the puppy will recover. It is vital, however, that a puppy

receives supportive therapy immediately if Parvo is suspected. It must be stressed that this is not a bad case of doggy flu; without medical treatment, most puppies will die.

Are some breeds more susceptible than others?

For some reason, Rottweilers, Doberman Pinschers, labs and some other large breeds are especially prone to Parvo and seem to succumb to parvo faster and with less chance of recovery than any other breed. If you have one of these breeds, it's even more important to make certain your puppy or dog gets immunized properly. But these breeds are not alone -- the Parvovirus can affect all breeds.

How do I prevent the spread of Parvo?

The surest way to avoid parvo infection in your dog is to adhere to the recommended vaccination schedule which begins when puppies are 6-8 weeks of age. Puppies should not be allowed to socialize with other dogs or frequent areas where other dogs have been until 2 weeks after they have had their last vaccination. Immunization for parvo is usually included in your dog's distemper vaccine. This shot gives protection against several potentially fatal canine diseases in one shot. If your pet becomes infected, please keep in mind that dogs with parvo shed the virus in their feces and are extremely contagious to other dogs.

Follow these recommendations to help prevent the spread of this disease. Keep the infected dog isolated from all other dogs for at least one month after full recovery.

- Clean up all the dog's stools in your yard.-- Use a 1:30 ratio (4 oz. in 1 gallon of water) of chlorine bleach and water to clean the area(s) where the puppy has been, food and water bowls, and if possible, the yard. Wash any bedding the dog has been in contact with in this same bleach solution and hot water. You should also try to disinfect any other areas that the dog has been, like linoleum, concrete kennels, crates, etc. -- If you have any other dogs that are two years old or younger, or who have never been vaccinated for parvo, please get them booster shots as soon as possible.-- Be sure to feed your dog a bland diet, such as Canine Prescription I/D, until he is fully recovered. When switching back to its normal diet, mix the regular food with the I/D for 2-3 days to help your pet gradually adjust to the change.

What If I've got Parvo in my home?

If you have had parvo in your home, use a strong bleach/water solution to kill it. Soak the yard with it -- better to kill the grass than your next dog! Be careful when using it on carpets and fabrics, though. Parvo can live up to 6 years or more in your home or yard if left on its own. Before you bring home another dog, be sure it has had all its vaccinations and is in overall good health. This will help to ensure a stronger immunity to parvo. You can have a veterinarian draw blood and run a titer to find out how well your prospective dog will fare in a parvo-infected environment. Adult dogs generally have a higher resistance than puppies do, but they need to be kept current on their vaccines. If in doubt, have your vet do the titer.