

Ask A Vet: Devastating, but Preventable

Sunday, July 31, 2016

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I recently found out that my good friend's ten week old puppy was diagnosed with parvovirus. I guess it had diarrhea and vomiting for two days before taking it to the vet. Can you please tell me about this disease and how at risk are my dogs of getting this?

-Concerned

Dear Concerned,

Parvovirus or Parvo is a very contagious and life threatening disease. It is most preventable by having vaccines to protect your dog from getting this. Those animals that have a full set of inoculations as a puppy (generally three to four at two to four weeks apart) will be generally safe from getting this. There are two forms of this disease: the intestinal form that causes the vomiting and diarrhea like your friend's; or the cardiac form that hits the heart and can lead to death. This devastating disease is seen in animals that are unvaccinated or improperly vaccinated. The most common age for them to be get this is anywhere from four to twenty weeks of age. I have seen this in older animals however that never were vaccinated and were exposed. Generally about 85 % of dogs are less than a year of age.

It is transmitted by contact with another dog's feces that has the virus in their stool. This could even mean that the virus can be transmitted from any object, person, or animal acting as a carrier where an infected dog has been such as streets or parks. The virus affects the lining of the gastrointestinal tract and white blood cells. As mentioned before, it can affect the heart muscle as well. An animal can show symptoms or signs as early as three days to two weeks after exposure. The animal may appear to be fine one day and then progress to just not "feeling well" to decreased appetite, lethargy, vomiting and bloody diarrhea and dehydration. One may or may not have fever associated with this disease.

Survival rate with treatment can be as much as 75%. Treatment consists of hospitalization with intravenous fluids and anti-nausea medicine. This can be costly. Sometimes alternatively take home fluids can be given by the owner under the skin several times a day along with antibiotics and anti-nausea meds. Depending on the virulence of the virus (how strong it is) and the prompt attention to treatment generally dictates how successful treatment will be.

The dog can shed the virus up to six weeks following recovery and one must be cautious of contact with other dogs. It is important to disinfect areas where the virus came in contact with during and after treatment. Bleach is very effective at disinfecting areas with a 1:30 ration, bleach to water. Other products are available but it should say that it will kill parvo on the label since the virus can live in soil as long as a year. The best way to prevent this devastating disease is proper vaccination as recommended by your veterinarian and minimize contact with other dogs until all sets of shots are given.

-Dr. Wanda Schmeltz