Canine Parvovirus
ADVICE FOR OWNERS
Canine Parvovirus

- Canine parvovirus is a serious and highly contagious disease which has a high mortality (death) rate in untreated dogs.
- Canine parvovirus attacks the gastrointestinal tract and immune system of dogs and puppies.
- Disease is rapidly spread by direct contact with other infected dogs or infected materials such as faeces, food dishes and soil.
- There is no effective treatment for canine parvovirus and supportive care is all that can be given.
- Disease can be effectively prevented by vaccination against canine parvovirus.

What is canine parvovirus?
Canine parvovirus is a highly contagious and serious disease that is caused by the canine parvovirus type 2 (CPV-2) virus. The virus attacks the gastrointestinal tract and immune system of puppies, dogs and wild canids (e.g. foxes). It can also damage the heart muscle in very young and unborn puppies.

There are several variants of CPV-2 and in the UK the CPV-2a and CPV-2b variants are most common.

How is parvovirus spread?
CPV-2 is highly contagious and is spread through direct contact with other infected dogs or with infected faeces. The virus readily contaminates the environment, equipment or people that have come into contact with infected dogs. CPV-2 is easily carried and transmitted by contaminated hands, clothes and shoes, food and water bowls, collars and leads. The virus is very stable in the environment and can survive for over a year. It is resistant to heat, cold, drought and humidity.

Which dogs are at risk?
All dogs are at risk, but puppies less than four months old and dogs that have not been vaccinated against canine parvovirus have an increased risk of becoming infected and ill.

What are the signs of parvovirus infection?
- Lethargy (extreme tiredness)
- Loss of appetite
- Fever
- Vomiting
- Severe diarrhoea (often bloody)

Vomiting and diarrhoea can cause rapid dehydration and most deaths from parvovirus occur within 48-72 hours following the onset of clinical signs.

If your puppy or dog shows any of these signs contact your vet immediately.

How is parvovirus diagnosed and treated?
Diagnosis is made based on history, signs of disease, physical examination, and laboratory tests performed on blood and faeces. No specific treatment or drug is available that will kill the virus in infected dogs. Only supportive care can be given and usually consists of fluid therapy, medications to control vomiting and diarrhoea, prevention of secondary infections and intensive nursing care. 85-90% of treated dogs recover from parvovirus infection, however due to the extensive supportive care required treatment costs can be expensive. In untreated dogs the mortality rate can exceed 90%.

Infected dogs should be kept isolated from other dogs until they have recovered and are no longer shedding (spreading) the virus. The environment, bowls, collar etc. should be disinfected with a dilute bleach solution.

How is parvovirus prevented?
Vaccination and good hygiene are vital to preventing parvovirus infection. Due to the severity and prevalence of parvovirus the vaccine is considered a core (essential) vaccine meaning that all dogs should be protected from this disease.

All puppies should receive a course of the CPV-2 vaccine. Young puppies are very susceptible to infection, particularly because the natural immunity provided in the mother’s milk may wear off before the puppies’ own immune system is mature enough to fight off the infection. A puppy may become ill if it is exposed to infection during this gap in protection or before full immunity from vaccination has been achieved. Vaccination is generally started at 6 to 8 weeks of age and a dose is given every 3-4 weeks for a minimum of 2 doses. Regardless of how many doses have been given earlier, a dose of vaccine given between 14 and 16 weeks of age may ensure the best protection against parvovirus and is recommended by some veterinary practices based on individual risk. A booster vaccination is then administered every 1 to 3 years. Your vet will be able to recommend the most appropriate vaccination schedule for your pet. In spite of proper vaccination, a small percentage of dogs do not develop immunity to parvovirus and remain susceptible to infection.

Remember!
- Do not walk your puppy on the ground outside and keep them away from other dogs at parks, groomers, puppy classes and kennels until their vaccination schedule has been completed.
- Do not let your puppy or dog come into contact with the faeces of other dogs while walking outdoors, and always promptly dispose of your pets waste.
- Avoid contact with known infected dogs and their premises.

Questions for my veterinarian:

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