

## **Is your dog vaccinated?**

Several decades ago I worked for a few years at an animal hospital in London run by the PDSA. It was a very busy hospital and, being run by the PDSA, only saw people (and their pets) who could not afford to go to a private Veterinary Surgeon.. Many of the animals coming in had been ill for some time, or had been neglected, so it was a challenging place to work. A lot of the dogs had not been vaccinated so we saw many cases of infectious diseases, especially parvovirus, which at the time was a fairly new disease. We had a whole ward of mainly young dogs and puppies all being treated for parvovirus with intravenous fluids and antibiotics. These helped save some of them but there was, and still isn't, no specific cure. It was a heart breaking place to work. Many lost so much blood in their diarrhoea that they died of shock. Unfortunately there were always new cases to take their place!

Nowadays there is a very effective vaccine which protects dogs from this unpleasant disease so it is not seen so commonly in this area although it is still present in the cities. Of course, as seen by the measles epidemic in Wales, if enough dogs remain unvaccinated, or do not get their boosters, it may become prevalent again.

Canine parvovirus is a small, but extremely hardy virus that can survive in the environment for long periods of time - months or even years.

The disease first emerged as an epidemic in the 1970s, killing thousands of dogs before an effective vaccine became available. Although no longer present in epidemic proportions, parvovirus is still relatively common in unvaccinated dogs, and veterinary surgeons throughout the country regularly report outbreaks of the disease. Therefore, protecting your dog through vaccination is vitally important.

## **Who is at risk?**

All unvaccinated animals, particularly those in high-risk areas and young puppies, are at risk. Parvovirus causes enteritis, it is seen in any age of dog from about four weeks of age, but most commonly in dogs less than one year old.



## How is it spread?

The main source of infection is the faeces of infected dogs; the virus can also spread on shoes and clothing and on the coat and pads of dogs. The virus is transmitted through the mouth or nose from faeces. CPV can be passed out in the faeces of a dog within 3-4 days after infection and before clinical signs are seen.

Canine parvovirus affects all breeds of domesticated dog, as well as wild dogs, and the virus may also be transmitted to cats, ferrets and mink.

A dog that successfully recovers from this disease generally remains contagious for up to three weeks, but it is possible they may remain contagious for up to six.

## Signs and symptoms

The incubation period of CPV is generally 4-7 days. Individuals normally have severe enteritis, however occasionally, animals may only have mild symptoms.

Signs usually consist of depression, severe vomiting, refusal of food and water, abdominal pain and profuse smelly, bloody diarrhoea. This can result in rapid and severe dehydration, and ultimately death.

## Prevention and control

There is no specific treatment for canine parvovirus, so it is important to ensure that your dog is vaccinated in both puppyhood and adult life. If your dog has not had a booster injection recently then speak to your Veterinary surgeon now. It really is not worth taking the risk.

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