



Canine Parvovirus (CPV)

Canine Parvovirus is incredibly contagious and most commonly affects non vaccinated or improperly vaccinated dogs between the ages of six weeks to six months. Puppies can also be infected in the womb should the mother not have sufficient immunity. Older animals whose vaccination status has waned over a period of years may also be at risk of the disease.

CPV targets rapidly dividing tissues – namely the cells lining the intestines, the bone marrow and those tissues involved in helping the immune system develop.

Signs and symptoms

Destruction of the cells that line the intestines reduces the guts ability to absorb nutrients but also disrupts the barrier between the gut contents and blood stream. This means that bacteria and other nasties can gain access to the rest of the body. Signs of disease usually develop 3-7 days after infection and can include lethargy, loss of appetite, vomiting and bloody diarrhoea. Puppies may also go into shock and collapse. Because the tissues involved in the immune response are also targeted, your puppy will be at risk of other opportunistic infections and so other symptoms may develop, depending on the type of secondary infection.

Diagnosis

Should your puppy suffer the symptoms listed above, it is important that you **contact your vet immediately**. The history provided, clinical signs and a simple blood test are often enough to give an indication of disease. Confirmation of CPV can be sought using a special in-house test and a small stool sample from your dog.

Treatment

The treatment for parvovirus is mainly supportive. Replacing fluids lost in vomit and diarrhoea, whilst treating any concurrent bacterial infections, plays a major role in returning your animal to health. Despite treatment, some dogs will unfortunately succumb to the condition and those that pull through may take some time before they are returned to full health. BUT, with appropriate treatment the good news is that 68-92% of animals can make a recovery. Although the survival rate is good when appropriate treatment is provided, getting your animal through this disease is often a nerve-wracking and costly process.

Prevention

CPV is an entirely preventable condition; following a relatively simple and low cost vaccination protocol should protect your dog. There are several vaccines out there and your vet will decide on the most appropriate course for your animal. Usually puppies receive a primary vaccination course from as early as 6 weeks of age. This usually consists of a round of two injections spaced 2-4 weeks apart. However, if a puppy has been vaccinated before 8 weeks of age, your vet may well recommend a third injection. This is because puppies will have some immunity passed down from their mother (provided she has been vaccinated – or suffered from CPV) and this can prevent the vaccine stimulating the required immune response in the puppy. However from 8 weeks of age this is thought to have waned sufficiently to allow immune development to occur unhindered.

Thereafter yearly, every two-yearly or ever three-yearly vaccinations for parvovirus will boost your dog's immune response and offer protection from this extremely debilitating and life threatening disease.