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**PARVOVIRUS INFECTION**

Parvovirus is a viral disease affecting dogs, which can cause two different problems. The intestinal form will cause diarrhea, which is often bloody, and death. The second form can affect the heart, usually occurs in the very young puppy, and is not very common.

Any age or sex of dog may be affected by Parvovirus. However, being infected with the virus does not automatically result in illness. Many factors will affect the severity of the illness. These factors include age, breed, environment, stress, parasites, and general health. The illness may range in severity from very mild to very severe. Illness is most common in dogs less than six months of age.

The virus is resistant to temperature extremes and is not harmed by many common disinfectants. Transmission of the disease occurs when the Parvovirus comes in contact with a healthy dog. The virus is in heavy concentration in the infected dog's feces. The virus can easily be spread on shoes, clothing, and other inanimate objects. Flies and people can easily become an indirect source of infection.

The Parvovirus cycle has three stages. The first stage (oral phase) occurs when the virus is ingested and invades the lymph nodes in the throat. The second stage (viremia phase) occurs when the virus enters the blood stream and is carried throughout the body. As the infection spreads, the signs of illness will become apparent. In the third stage (contagious phase), the virus is passed in the dog's feces and can infect other dogs. Transmission of the disease can occur for several weeks after the dog has been infected. Parvovirus in the environment can infect susceptible dogs for many months.

The clinical signs of a Parvovirus infection include depression, loss of appetite, vomiting, and diarrhea with or without blood. Vomiting and diarrhea lead to dehydration, chemical imbalances and death; Secondary bacterial infections commonly occur and complicate the viral infection. The heart form of Parvovirus infections is most common in puppies less than 8 weeks of age. The signs are crying, weakness, extreme depression, an unwillingness to nurse, difficulty breathing, or sudden death.

Early treatment is important and may save the dog's life. The treatment of Parvovirus infections is symptomatic and supportive. Intravenous fluids are given to correct dehydration and maintain hydration, antibiotics are given to treat secondary bacterial infections, nutritional support is provided, and other symptomatic care depending upon the individual needs of the puppy is given.

The survival rate with aggressive intravenous therapy and hospitalization is about 80%; but it depends on the severity of the illness at the time the puppy is presented for veterinary care, the level of care, and the puppy's ability to fight the infection and survive. Often the puppy will need to be hospitalized for five days or longer. The survival rate with outpatient therapy or restricted medical therapy is much less.

To effectively control Parvovirus infections, the contact with other dogs and dog stools should be minimized. A solution of bleach, diluted one part bleach to 30 parts water is effective in disinfecting inanimate objects such as clothing, floors and kennels. Having the puppy receive a series of vaccinations by a veterinarian is the most effective means to decrease the incidence of Parvovirus disease.

Contact your veterinarian for vaccinations and further information.