

Some things in veterinary medicine just need repeating. That's why from time to time I'll re-run a column if the topic is an especially important one. Recently at our office we've seen a few cases of Canine Parvo Viral Enteritis or "Parvo" for short. This is after months of not seeing a single case. All dog owners (especially puppy owners) need to be aware of this deadly disease. So please indulge me as I re-visit the topic of Canine Parvo Virus.

I'll never forget my first day on the job as a veterinarian some 22 years ago. I started this job in Southern California within days of graduating from veterinary school. I wanted to start practicing as soon after graduation as possible, presumably so I wouldn't forget everything I learned. My first assignment that first morning was to go to the back of the hospital, to the isolation ward, and treat the dogs that were infected with Parvo virus. No big deal I thought, while I couldn't actually say that I'd treated a dog with Parvo before. (truth be told-I'd never even *seen* a dog with Parvo before!) I had read about it, I had passed the State Board exam, so I could probably handle a couple of cases. It's a good thing I didn't look back that morning as I walked down the hall to the isolation ward; otherwise I'd surely have seen the other veterinarians chuckling among themselves. Two hours and seven very sick Parvo patients later I finished with a new appreciation for this deadly disease. Thank goodness I had a skilled, knowledgeable, and patient nurse to guide me through that first busy morning. Becky, where ever you are, thank-you!

Hallmark symptoms of Parvo infection are vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, and listlessness. These symptoms often develop very quickly so it's not unusual to hear that a puppy seemed fine in the morning but was very sick by the afternoon. Unfortunately, these symptoms are rather non-specific; that is to say illnesses other than Parvo can show the same symptoms. Your veterinarian can diagnose Parvo infection with a fecal test that screens for the virus in the stool. Additionally, certain blood tests can help with developing a treatment plan and in determining a prognosis for recovery.

Caring for a dog with Parvo is no small task. Understand that there is no medicine we can give these patients that will kill the virus. Puppies that recover from this illness do so only because their immune systems mount a successful response and clear the virus from the system. Therapy is aimed at keeping the puppy alive until the immune system can summon the ability to rid the virus. Such therapy involves supportive care with fluids to replace fluid losses from the vomiting and diarrhea and prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are used to prevent secondary bacterial infections. Antibiotics are very important since the virus temporarily damages the lining of the intestines, which can allow intestinal bacteria access to the bloodstream. Since these patients are vomiting and cannot hold down any orally administered fluids or medicine, most cases require hospitalization with fluids and medicines administered intravenously. These patients are definitely in the "ICU" of the veterinary hospital. Hospital stays can vary from a day or two in mild cases to a week or more in severe cases.

If there is any good news here it is that Parvo is largely a preventable disease. Good quality vaccines given at the appropriate times during puppyhood with boosters in adulthood can prevent most infections. Vaccination is not a guarantee, but it will dramatically reduce your dog's chances of contracting this dreaded illness. This is not

the time to be “penny wise and pound foolish”. The nominal cost of vaccination pales in comparison to the potential cost of treatment.

Even worse than the potential costs, is the potential loss of a beloved new family member. Vaccinate your dog-save a life!

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