Parvovirus



Viruses in General

Viruses are tiny infective agents that live inside the cells of other animals. They can infect a wide variety of organisms, including people, animals, and even bacteria. Viruses consist of mostly genetic material, and their primary goal is to “trick” the host’s body into reproducing this

genetic material. When enough viral particles are reproduced, the host cell dies. This is what causes symptoms of viral infection. Viruses are particularly difficult to treat because they live inside the cells of another organism and are therefore “protected” from the normal treatments, such as antibiotics, that cannot directly kill viruses.

About Parvovirus

Parvovirus is a virus that infects the digestive system and immune system of animals. Parvovirus can affect almost any type of mammal, but it cannot be transmitted among pets of different species or between people and pets. Although it is usually seen in puppies and young adults, it can affect an unvaccinated animal of any age. It is spread easily through infected stool or soil. When an infected animal defecates outside, some of the virus is shed into the feces and into the soil. The next animal that comes to explore this area may become infected. The parvovirus is also very hardy and can live outside the host organism for 3-months or more. Animals with parvovirus must be strictly quarantined. Any areas the infected animal has come into contact must be disinfected with a solution of 1 part bleach to 30 parts water with at least 10-minutes of contact time.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of Parvovirus are vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, loss of appetite and reduced water consumption. These symptoms can quickly lead to dehydration and

malnutrition, so it is important to treat Parvovirus early.

Making a Diagnosis

There are special Parvovirus fecal tests to determine if an animal has Parvovirus. Because it takes a trained veterinarian to interpret the results of the test and to confirm a diagnosis together with additional blood tests, it is essential to see a licensed and experienced veterinarian for testing. While testing for parvovirus is available, no test is 100% conclusive so the attending veterinarian must consider test results together with the clinical symptoms and history of the patient to confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment

Because Parvovirus is a virus, there is no cure. The key to treatment is hospitalized supportive care, including fluids to fight dehydration, antibiotics to fight secondary infection, medication to alleviate vomiting, pain control, and nutritional supplements. Again, the key is to provide the body with supportive care to boost the immune system, which will allow it to fight the infection on its own.

Prognosis

While very dangerous and potentially fatal in small puppies and unvaccinated dogs, many dogs have survived Parvovirus with accurate diagnosis, early medical intervention, hospitalization and treatment.

Prevention

Parvovirus can be *prevented* with proper care. For puppies, avoid taking them outside until they are fully vaccinated. This will keep your puppy from being exposed and potentially infected. Puppies may receive their first vaccination for Parvovirus at 6-8 weeks, followed by 2 more vaccinations on a schedule recommended by your ICVS veterinarian. Revaccinating each year can prevent your adult dog from contracting Parvovirus. Vaccinations for Parvovirus are very effective, and if given as instructed by your veterinarian, can be an essential factor in keeping your pet healthy and safe.

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