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Parvovirus - Home clean up

What is parvovirus?

Parvovirus is a highly contagious virus that affects unvaccinated dogs and puppies. The most common symptoms of parvovirus are vomiting and diarrhoea. Some dogs may only have vomiting or diarrhoea and some may simply not want to eat and be more lethargic than normal especially in the early stages.

Protecting dogs against parvovirus

Vaccinations are available to protect dogs and puppies against parvovirus. Puppies generally are vaccinated at 6-8 weeks, 10-12 weeks and sometimes 14-16 weeks. They then get another vaccination after 1 year then every 1-3 years depending on the vaccine (the vaccine we use here at Murray Bridge Vet Clinic protects adult dogs against Parvovirus for 3 years). Puppies that have received a full course of vaccinations more than 2 weeks ago and adult dogs that are up to date with their vaccinations should be immune to this virus.

Parvovirus is transmitted from one dog to another via infected faecal material (poo). As infected dogs have diarrhoea in most cases anywhere an infected dog has been should be considered contaminated. It also means it is possible to bring the virus home to your dog simply by walking where a sick dog has been and getting the virus on your shoes.

Treatment of parvovirus

Dogs with parvovirus need to be admitted to hospital to be properly treated. A test is performed first to confirm infection. Veterinary attention should be sought as soon as possible if you think your dog may have parvovirus as dogs can die from this disease very quickly, this is especially true for young puppies. The most important part of treating parvovirus is giving intravenous fluids to prevent dehydration. Medication is also given to relieve pain, prevent further infection and stop vomiting. Dogs may be in hospital anywhere from overnight to 10 or more days. Most dogs are in hospital 3-4 nights. The majority of dogs with parvovirus survive if veterinary treatment is received soon after they become sick.

Cleaning up your house/yard after a dog has had parvovirus

Parvovirus is a virus that survives a long time in the environment and is very hard to kill. It can survive for several years in certain environments. Most regular household cleaners do not kill this virus.

Anywhere that a dog infected with parvovirus has been should be considered contaminated. This includes footwear and clothing worn by people who have handled the dog while it is sick. Generally if a dog has been in your house any room the dog has been in should be considered contaminated, any room the dogs bedding has been in should be considered contaminated and if the dog has been in the yard the entire yard should be considered contaminated.

Before using any cleaners any faeces (poo) should be collected, double bagged and thrown out. Anything contaminated that can be thrown away and replaced should be. The best household cleaner to use to kill parvovirus is bleach (1 part bleach to 30 parts water). It should be used on hard surfaces including tiles, concrete, paving bottoms of shoes etc – leave the bleach on the surface at least 10-15 minutes. Anything that can be washed in bleach should be. A veterinary cleaner called F10 can be supplied in a spray bottle and used on items that cannot be cleaned with bleach. Contaminated carpet, soft furnishings and clothing/bedding should be cleaned thoroughly using a colour-safe bleach solution if possible (test it first in case it discolours the material). Soak clothing/bedding in the bleach first. Steam cleaning can also be effective if temperatures reach 120-130 degrees Celsius for 10-15 minutes. Hanging things out in the hot sun to dry can also assist in killing off any remaining virus.

Ultimately anything that is not a hard object/surface will be difficult to clean adequately. Once areas such as lawn or dirt have been contaminated with parvovirus they are practically impossible to adequately clean and unvaccinated dogs should not be allowed in these areas for years after a sick dog has been on them. This means any future puppies should not be allowed in the yard until 2 weeks after their last puppy vaccination.

If my dog is diagnosed with parvovirus should I get other dogs in my household vaccinated?

The short answer to this question is if they are well yes – get them vaccinated as soon as possible if they are not already up to date. You will also need to keep them away from any area contaminated with parvovirus until 2 weeks after their vaccination.

Once a dog has been exposed to the virus it takes 3-14 days for them to get sick. It also takes up to 2 weeks for a vaccine to be effective. This means that even if a dog is not sick yet they may still get sick after they are vaccinated if they have already been exposed to the virus. It also means that exposure to the virus needs to be stopped until the vaccine can work – this means keeping them away from anywhere a sick dog has been for 2 weeks. If there is no clean area in your house/yard this may mean that they need to be cared for elsewhere for 2 weeks until the vaccine works. Keep in mind they may still get sick and contaminate their new area so make sure they are not being looked after anywhere another unvaccinated dog may be or may be in the future.

My dog has had parvovirus and is coming home, for how long is he/she still contagious?

Generally to be safe we assume a dog that has had parvovirus will be still contagious for 2 weeks. For this period you should shower and change after handling your dog before going out or handling other unvaccinated dogs. Clean clothing/bedding as described above. You should keep your dog either in an area that is already contaminated (don't worry they won't get it again – see below) or an area such as a bathroom or laundry that can be easily cleaned.

If my dog has had parvovirus can they get it again?

Dogs that have previously had the virus are generally immune to the virus for life and should not get it again. It is possible for them to get a different strain of parvovirus later on but this is highly unlikely as immunity against one strain usually provides protection against other strains. We still recommend vaccination of dogs that have had parvovirus once they are well to protect them against the other diseases the vaccine covers.