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Canine Parvovirus: What Every Owner Should Know

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Canine parvovirus (CPV) most commonly infects puppies and unvaccinated dogs and has the ability to cause serious disease. It is a highly contagious virus that can be transmitted through direct contact with infected dogs, by sniffing or eating infected feces, or through contaminated environments. Symptoms include a decrease in appetite, lethargy, and weakness and are often associated with vomiting and large volumes of diarrhea. Dogs with CPV can develop potentially fatal complications. Hospitalization and aggressive treatment offer the best chance for a full recovery.

What to Expect When Your Pet Is Hospitalized

Treatment is aimed at controlling your pet's symptoms and providing supportive care until their immune system is able to control the virus. Historically, there have been no medications available to directly treat parvovirus, but a new treatment option, Canine Parvovirus Monoclonal Antibody (CPMA), is now available. Studies have indicated that dogs with CPV and treated with CPMA tend to have a higher chance of survival and experience faster resolution of vomiting, inappetence, and lethargy. Regardless of aggressive treatment, complications can arise during the course of disease, so your pet will need to be closely monitored.

Because of the highly infectious nature of CPV, your pet will be isolated away from other pets while hospitalized. Veterinary staff will follow strict protocols to prevent the spread of CPV, including disinfectant foot baths, wearing gloves and gowns, and frequently washing hands.

- Once hospitalized, your pet will be monitored closely by veterinary staff. Their temperature, heart rate, respiratory rate, and blood pressure will likely be monitored regularly. Frequent blood work will also be recommended to help monitor your pet's response to treatment and detect any signs of secondary complications.

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- An IV catheter will be placed in your pet’s leg or neck to allow for administration of fluids and medications. An Elizabethan collar (E-collar) may be placed around your pet’s neck to prevent them from chewing their IV catheter.
- Antinausea medications, medications to relieve abdominal pain, and antibiotics to treat any bacterial infections may be administered through the IV or by mouth if your pet is not vomiting.
- If your pet does not eat for a prolonged period of time, nutritional support may be provided either through a feeding tube or IV supplemental nutrition.

Environmental Cleanup at Home

CPV is a very hardy virus and can survive in the environment for >1 year under favorable conditions, including both indoor and outdoor areas.

To help prevent the spread of CPV, your home should be disinfected while your pet is in the hospital. All surfaces should be disinfected, including bedding, food and water bowls, toys, and any surface that has been contaminated by feces and/or vomit, including the yard. After cleaning all surfaces to remove dirt, feces, and vomit, bleach that has been diluted at a ratio of 1 part bleach to 30 parts water should be applied to those surfaces. Diluted bleach should be allowed to sit for at least 10 minutes before rinsing with water. Any surface that cannot be cleaned with bleach should be steam-cleaned. Laundry should be separated and washed immediately. Washing laundry with a bleach labeled for parvovirus can reduce the risk for the virus surviving after washing.

Recovery & Isolation

Once recovered, your pet will need to be isolated from other dogs and public areas for 14 days after the resolution of symptoms to prevent the spread of CPV. Because parvovirus can remain in a home environment (indoor and outdoor) for up to 1 year, it is not recommended that new puppies be introduced into the home until they are fully vaccinated. Humans cannot be infected with CPV.

Vaccination Against Canine Parvovirus

Vaccination against CPV is highly effective and is considered a core vaccine for all dogs. Dogs are typically administered a combination vaccine (DAPP) that includes canine distemper, adenovirus, canine parvovirus, and parainfluenza. The first vaccine is given to puppies when they are 6 to 8 weeks of age, then every 2 to 4 weeks until they are at least 16 to 20 weeks of age. Puppies remain susceptible to disease until 2 weeks after the final vaccination in that series is administered, meaning precautions should be taken to avoid high-risk areas (eg, public places, dog parks, other puppies, unvaccinated dogs) from birth until 2 weeks after they receive the final vaccination in the puppy series. The vaccine is then administered 1 year after the completion of their puppy series, then every 1 to 3 years thereafter. Once your pet has recovered from CPV, your dog can resume the recommended vaccination schedule.

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