

## **Parvo and Your Dog**

Parvo is a contagious and potentially fatal virus that occurs in dogs less than 1 year of age 85% of the time. The virus emerged in the 70's as a mutated form from cats at which time dogs of all ages became ill. Now older dogs have immunity from repeated vaccines or from being exposed at an early age. Therefore, this is primarily a disease of puppies, particularly puppies between the ages of 6-16 weeks. The younger the dogs are when they become ill, the more serious the clinical condition.

Clinical signs include lethargy and decreased appetite followed by severe vomiting and diarrhea. Dogs pick up the virus from the environment which can persist outdoors for 6 months to 2 years under the harshest conditions.

The environment is contaminated by the feces of a dog that is carrying the virus and may not be clinically ill. It is impossible to kill the virus in the environment without killing all vegetation. Indoors and on outdoor surfaces a 10% bleach solution will kill the virus.

Since puppies are the most susceptible to the virus and become the most ill, it is important to start vaccines at 6-8 weeks of age. Puppies are born with some immunity to parvo because they receive antibodies from their mother. These antibodies start to fade between the ages of 8 and 12 weeks in most dogs. Until these antibodies fade, they interfere with the vaccine and do not allow strong protection. It is important to have at least two vaccines after the time of the antibodies fading. Vaccines should be repeated every 3-4 weeks until the animal reaches 16-18 weeks to achieve good immunity.

Certain breeds of dogs such as Rottweilers and Dobermans should have up to 2 extra doses during this time because they are very sensitive to parvo virus and need extra protection. Puppies who get active parvo infection must be treated immediately.

There is no treatment or antidote for parvo, but supportive care allows about 75% of dogs who are diagnosed early to survive the viral infection. A parvo test is available and is 85% accurate. Other methods exist to diagnose parvo such as clinical signs, white blood cell count, and history of exposure without history of proper vaccination.

The only true way to protect your dogs from parvo virus infection is frequent vaccination as puppies followed by yearly boosters.