

Parvo Frequently Asked Questions

Please note there are many common causes for a puppy to have bloody stool and vomiting so please let your vet check over your puppy as soon as possible.

Parvovirus

Parvovirus is a viral disease of dogs. It affects puppies much more frequently than it affects adult dogs. The virus likes to grow in rapidly dividing cells. The intestinal lining has the biggest concentration of rapidly dividing cells in a puppy's body. The virus attacks and kills these cells, causing diarrhea (often bloody), depression and suppression of white blood cells -- which come from another group of rapidly dividing cells. In very young puppies it can infect the heart muscle and lead to "sudden" death.

Parvovirus Vaccination

Parvovirus is probably the most common viral illness of dogs at the present time. It is much more common in puppies than it is in adult dogs. It can be very hard to successfully vaccinate a puppy for this disease because the antibody protection the puppy acquires from its mother can interfere with vaccination. Many vets recommend vaccinating puppies every three to four weeks for this virus starting at 6 weeks of age and continuing until they are at least 16 weeks of age and preferably 20 weeks of age. It is possible that this vaccine confers lifelong immunity once it does work but most veterinarians continue to recommend yearly vaccination for it. It seems prudent to at least get the vaccination at one year of age. Since it is combined with the other vaccines it is often easier just to give it yearly with them.

What are the symptoms of Parvo?

Parvo" is a virus that attacks the lining of the digestive system. It causes dogs and puppies to not be able to absorb nutrients or liquids. Puppies are especially prone to it because they have an immature immune system. When dogs and puppies contract parvo, they often have diarrhea, vomiting and lethargy. Usually they stop eating and develop a bloody, foul-smelling, liquid stool.

Symptoms usually begin with a high fever, lethargy, depression, and loss of appetite. Secondary symptoms appear as severe gastrointestinal distress, such as vomiting and bloody diarrhea. In many cases, dehydration, shock, and death follow.

Parvovirus is characterized by severe, bloody diarrhea and vomiting, high fever and lethargy. The diarrhea is particularly foul smelling and is sometimes yellow in color. Parvo can also attack a dog's heart causing congestive heart failure. This complication can occur months or years after an apparent recovery from the intestinal form of the disease. Puppies who survive parvo infection usually remain somewhat un-healthy and weak for life.

How is Parvo transmitted?

Canine parvovirus is carried by dogs. Adult dogs may be infected carriers without showing any clinical signs. Dogs with the typical diarrhea that parvovirus causes shed the virus as well. It can last a long time in the environment, perhaps as long as 9 months or longer. Generally, it takes 7-10 days from the time of exposure for dogs and puppies to start showing symptoms and to test positive for parvo.

Parvo is highly contagious to unprotected dogs, and the virus can remain infectious in ground contaminated with fecal material for five months or more if conditions are favorable. Extremely hardy, most disinfectants cannot kill the virus, however chlorine bleach is the most effective and inexpensive agent that works, and is commonly used by veterinarians.

The ease with which infection with Parvo can occur in any unvaccinated dog must be stressed. The virus is extremely hardy in the environment. Withstanding wide temperature fluctuations and most cleaning agents. Parvo can be brought home to your dog on shoes, hands and even car tires. It can live for many months outside the animal. Any areas that are thought to be contaminated with parvo should be thoroughly washed with chlorine bleach diluted 1 ounce per quart of water.

Dogs and puppies can contract parvo even if they never leave their yards. Parvo virus, despite what you might hear, is NOT an airborne virus. It is excreted in the feces of infected dogs, and if someone -- human, dog, bird, etc. -- steps in (or otherwise comes in contact with) the excrement, the possibility for contamination is great. Some people speculate that birds invading a dog's food dish can deposit the parvovirus there. If you think you may have come in contact with parvovirus, a strong solution of bleach and water does kill the virus, so you can wash your shoes and clothes, even your hands with it, to reduce the risk of infecting your dog. Rest assured that parvovirus is specific to dogs alone and cannot be transmitted to humans or other pets of a different species, such as cats.

How is Parvo treated?

Without intense treatment, the victims of parvo die of dehydration. Treatment generally consists of IV or sub-cutaneous fluids and antibiotics. There is no cure. Veterinarians can only treat the symptoms palliatively, and try to keep the dog alive by preventing dehydration and loss of proteins. As there is no cure for any virus, treatment for parvo is mostly that of supporting the different systems in the body during the course of the disease. This includes giving fluids, regulating electrolyte levels, controlling body temperature and giving blood transfusions when necessary.

Dogs who have survived parvo can get it again. In the case of some puppies, a puppy testing negative for Parvo one day could succumb to the virus within a matter of days. It strikes fast and without mercy. Dr. Cathy Priddle has warned that sulfa drugs have been known to cause dehydration in dogs, suggesting that animals infected with parvovirus should not be given sulfa drugs.

You may also consult a homeopathic or naturopathic veterinarian for alternative Parvo treatments. There are some natural and homeopathic treatments for Parvo on the retail market. Amber Technology offers Parvaaid, an all natural herbal formula that the manufacturer claims has helped some animals overcome Parvo.

Will my dog die if he gets Parvo?

This is a very serious disease. Some puppies infected with parvovirus will die despite prompt and adequate treatment. While no extremely accurate statistics are available, a good guess is probably that 80% of puppies treated for parvovirus will live. Without treatment, probably 80% or more of the infected puppies would die.

Due to the high death rate, parvovirus gets a lot of free publicity. Many people just assume that any case of diarrhea in a dog is from parvovirus. This is not true. There are a lot of other diseases and disorders that lead to diarrhea. If you have a puppy, don't take any chances. Have your puppy examined by your vet if diarrhea is a factor in any disease. It is better to be safe than to be sorry.

If your dog becomes infected with parvovirus, he has about a 50-50 chance of survival. If he makes it through the first three to four days, he will usually make a rapid recovery, and be back on his feet within a week. It is vital, however, that he receives supportive therapy immediately. It must be stressed that this is not a bad case of doggy flu; without medical treatment, most puppies die.

Are some breeds more susceptible than others?

For some reason, Rottweilers, Doberman Pinschers, and other black and tan breeds are especially prone to Parvo, and seem to succumb to parvo faster and with less chance of recovery than any other breed. If you have one of these breeds, it's even more important to make certain your puppy or dog gets immunized properly. But these breeds are not alone -- the Parvovirus can affect all breeds.

How do I prevent the spread of Parvo?

The surest way to avoid parvo infection in your dog is to adhere to the recommended vaccination schedule which begins when puppies are 6-8 weeks of age. Puppies should not be allowed to socialize with other dogs or frequent areas where other dogs have been until 2 weeks after they have had their last vaccination. Immunization for parvo is usually included in your dog's distemper vaccine. This shot gives protection against several potentially fatal canine diseases all at the same time.

If your pet becomes infected, please keep in mind that dogs with parvo shed the virus in their feces and are extremely contagious to other dogs. Follow these recommendations to help prevent the spread of this disease.

- * Keep the infected dog isolated from all other dogs for at least one month after full recovery.
- * Clean up all the dog's stools in your yard.
- * Use a 1:30 ratio of chlorine bleach and water to clean food and water bowls (4 oz. in 1 gallon of water). Wash any bedding the dog has been in contact with in this same bleach solution and hot water. You should also try to disinfect any other areas that the dog has been, like linoleum, concrete kennels, crates, etc.

* If you have any other dogs that are two years old or younger, or who have never been vaccinated for parvo, please bring them in for a booster as soon as possible.

* Be sure to feed your dog a bland diet, such as Canine Prescription i/d, until he is fully recovered. When switching back to his normal diet, mix the regular food with the i/d for 2-3 days to help your pet gradually adjust to the change.

What If I've got Parvo in my home?

If you have had parvo in your home, use a strong bleach/water solution to kill it. Soak the yard with it -- better to kill the grass than your next dog! Be careful using it on carpets and fabrics, though. Parvo can live up to 6 months or so in your home or yard. Before you bring home another dog, be sure it has a strong immunity to parvo. You can have a veterinarian draw blood and run a titre to find out how well your prospective dog will fare in a parvo-infected environment. Adult dogs generally have a higher resistance than puppies do, but they need to be kept current on their vaccines. If in doubt, have your vet do the titre.