

## What is Parvovirus?

Commonly known as “parvo”, canine parvovirus is a virus that usually attacks the intestinal tract of dogs (canine parvovirus enteritis), and more rarely, the heart (myocarditis.)

Parvo is transmitted through the feces and vomit of infected dogs and puppies. The virus is extremely hardy and can survive in the environment for many, many months even after the feces is gone. Even more, it is resistant to most disinfectants with bleach being the only commonly available disinfectant that can reliably kill it. Because it is so hard to kill, parvo can be transmitted by many items, the hands, clothing or even the shoes of anyone who comes in contact with the virus. However, it is NOT airborne.

The rarer form of parvo, myocarditis, is transmitted by an infected mother in the uterus. This will affect the entire litter. “Fading puppy syndrome” kills puppies very quickly, usually when they are younger than six weeks of age.

Although parvo can infect dogs of any age, the highest incidence is seen in puppies six to 20 weeks old. Puppies become extremely ill and may die as soon as two days after showing symptoms. Puppies born to mothers who were well vaccinated for parvo are protected through maternal antibodies in the mother’s milk up to six weeks of age. Thereafter, there is a variable “window of susceptibility” when the antibodies acquired from the mother no longer offer protection but are still strong enough to interfere with the action of vaccination. This is why puppies must be repeatedly vaccinated up through 4 months of age.

Because the virus attacks rapidly dividing cells such as those in the intestines and the bone marrow, the first signs of parvo, which may not appear until five to seven days after infection, are depression; loss of appetite; vomiting; and severe diarrhea. The diarrhea may be almost black or yellow-gray and streaked with blood and tend to have a foul metallic odor. Dogs over four months of age may develop a subclinical form of the disease, perhaps experiencing only mild diarrhea and no symptoms at all. If the puppies recover from the infection they are immune for life.

Preventing the infection:

- ◆ Make sure your puppy is up to date and current on vaccinations
- ◆ Keep your pet, especially puppies under four (4) months of age, away from dogs and areas that you are not familiar with
- ◆ Remove animal feces from your yard frequently
- ◆ Keep food bowls and bedding clean
- ◆ Use a solution of one (1) ounce bleach to one (1) quart of water to disinfect any surface or object that MAY have come in contact with the virus.

Puppies must be protected against contracting parvo...but they also need socialization with other dogs to grow up healthy and happy. Puppy guardians should try to arrange “play times” with other puppies that are parvo-negative or attend puppy training classes which strongly enforce strict procedures to prevent the spread of this deadly disease.