

# Canine Parvovirus Disease

## What is canine parvovirus disease?

Canine parvovirus is a relatively new disease agent of dogs. It initially became apparent in 1978. Since that time, it has spread throughout the world. The causative organism is similar to parvoviruses that infect other animals and to the feline distemper virus.

## How is it transmitted?

The virus is shed in the feces (stools) of infected dogs. Transmission occurs when dogs ingest feces from infected dogs. The virus also can be carried to distant areas on the feet of dogs and shoes of people that have walked in contaminated areas.

## How does the disease develop?

After localizing in the lymph nodes, the virus spreads throughout the body. Two types of infection are apparent. In very young pups, parvovirus can infect the heart muscle (myocarditis), causing difficulty with breathing, weakness, and sudden death. In puppies and dogs of all ages, parvovirus can cause intestinal infection (enteritis).

## What are the signs of parvoviral enteritis?

Depression, loss of appetite, vomiting, and bloody, watery diarrhea with a rancid odor are the classic signs of parvoviral enteritis.

## What is the treatment?

Unless treatment is given, many affected animals will die from complications of severe dehydration. Medications to stop vomiting and diarrhea are administered along with sometimes massive amounts of intravenous fluids (given through a catheter placed in a vein). Antibiotics are used to counter secondary bacterial infections.

## How can the disease be prevented?

Because parvovirus is a relatively new disease agent in dogs, many people who are unfamiliar with its potentially harmful effects think that vaccination for this disease is not essential. On the contrary, vaccination against this dreadful disease is only humane. Follow your veterinarian's advice regarding this matter.

