**Springtime, Your Puppy and Parvo**

Spring is here, and this is the time of year when veterinarians start to see an early onset and high number of parvovirus-enteritis cases! Let’s take some time to not only explain what the disease is and how to treat it, but more importantly, how to PREVENT it! Here at the Dog Training Depot, we would prefer that you keep your puppies and dogs healthy by vaccinations and routine care, rather than waiting until your beloved canine is ill! This could prove not only costly to you but could also mean more invasive treatment for your dog!

Parvo is a serious viral disease that affects dogs. It cannot be transmitted to humans, although other parvoviruses do affect other species. The virus is able to remain in the environment for years, and so the virus may be found almost everywhere.

Parvo is primarily a disease of puppies (most common between 6 weeks and 6 months), but can be seen in older dogs that are not adequately vaccinated. Some breeds are more susceptible to the disease, especially Rottweilers, pit bulls, and Chihuahuas.

Dogs and puppies become infected by contact with other infected dogs, fecal contaminated objects, or the soil. Symptoms are seen in 3-10 days, and generally are a lack of appetite, lethargy, diarrhea, vomiting. Untreated, many of these puppies will die. The dogs may begin to shed the virus before they show symptoms, and may continue to shed the virus for over 3 weeks after infection. Some recovered dogs may become carriers and shed the virus periodically throughout their life.

Because parvo is caused by a virus, there is little specific treatment. Your veterinarian must treat the symptoms and let the disease run its course. The virus attacks cells in the gastrointestinal tract, killing many of these cells, resulting in a sloughing that produces profuse, bloody or mucoid diarrhea. Some puppies vomit food or clear to yellow fluid. Any puppy with vomiting or diarrhea, without a history of proper vaccination should be assessed promptly, preferably within 12-24 hours of the onset of symptoms. These small, young patients can become dehydrated very quickly. Bacteria from the intestines may also gain access to the bloodstream resulting in a serious infection. Your veterinarian will recommend hospitalization for IV fluids and medications for most puppies and dogs.

With proper treatment most dogs recover fully, but it may depend on the strain of the virus, size of the dog, timing of treatment, other conditions in the dog, and the dog’s ability to respond to treatment. The treatment can be quite expensive and is certainly much more expensive than simple vaccination.

The Parvo vaccine is very effective at preventing this disease, but puppies must receive multiple doses of an effective vaccine at the proper times. We recommend puppies start getting vaccinations against parvo between 6-8 weeks of age, and receive boosters every 3 weeks until they reach at least 16 weeks of age. Veterinary visits during this time also allow your veterinarian to screen for any congenital (birth) defects, administer appropriate dewormers, and discuss behavioral and social problems and proper puppy care.

It takes strong disinfectants to kill the virus, and it is very difficult to be effectively eliminate it from the soil. If you have had a puppy with parvovirus in your home or yard, that environment should be considered contaminated from now on. All surface and objects that can be cleaned should be scrubbed to remove organic matter and then disinfected with a diluted bleach solution. Care should still be taken when bringing any new puppies into that home. I recommend they already be started on vaccinations, and that extra care be taken to ensure they continue to get their boosters at the proper intervals.

Even more important are the steps YOU must take to protect your puppy before he/she has been fully vaccinated (most puppies are fully vaccinated at about 16 weeks of age). Before this time, you must limit your puppy’s socialization contact to your home and other safe zones. If you do take your puppy on outings to see the outside world, you can tote your puppy in a soft pet carrier. This way your puppy can still be socialized and experience the world around him, but in a manner that is safe to him/her! Also, when you take your young puppy to the veterinarian during this time frame, either HOLD your puppy (or bring him in a soft pet carrier) and do not allow his/her feet to touch the ground. Veterinarian offices are some of the worst places for exposing your vulnerable puppy to all manner of illness!

One other note, if you are purchasing a puppy from a breeder, it is advisable to ask your breeder to provide proof of the vaccinations your puppy has received in their care. You can then take this proof to your first well-check appointment with your vet and assure your veterinarian that your puppy is indeed current on his/her vaccinations. You also want to prevent the potentially dangerous scenario of ***over*** vaccinating your precious puppy!

The take home message is that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure – please bring your new puppy in for a well check visit with your vet today and let’s make sure you keep your pooch healthy and happy!

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