

Canine Parvovirus disease (CPV)

Canine parvovirus is a small, but extremely hardy virus that can survive in the environment for long periods of time - months or even years.

The disease first emerged as an epidemic in the 1970s, killing thousands of dogs before an effective vaccine became available. Although no longer present in epidemic proportions, parvovirus is still relatively common in unvaccinated dogs, and veterinary surgeons throughout the country regularly report outbreaks of the disease. Therefore, protecting your dog through vaccination is vitally important.

Who is at risk?

All unvaccinated animals, particularly those in high-risk areas and young puppies, are at risk. Parvovirus causes enteritis, it is seen in any age of dog from about four weeks of age, but most commonly in dogs less than one year old.

How is it spread?

The main source of infection is the faeces of infected dogs. The virus can also spread on shoes and clothing and on the coat and pads of dogs.

Cause of canine parvovirus

The cause of canine parvovirus disease is a highly contagious DNA-containing virus. There are currently two types prevalent in the UK, namely CPV-2a and CPV-2b. The virus is transmitted through the mouth or nose from faeces. CPV can be passed out in the faeces of a dog within 3-4 days after infection and before clinical signs are seen.

Canine parvovirus affects all breeds of domesticated dog, as well as wild dogs (including bush-dogs, coyotes, wolves) and the virus may also be transmitted to cats, ferrets and mink.

Signs and symptoms

The incubation period of CPV is generally 4-7 days. Individuals normally have severe enteritis, but occasionally animals may only have mild symptoms.

Signs usually consist of depression, severe vomiting, refusal of food and water, abdominal pain and profuse smelly, bloody diarrhoea. This can result in rapid and severe dehydration, and ultimately death.

Prevention and control

There is no specific treatment for canine parvovirus, so it is important to ensure that your dog is vaccinated in both puppyhood and adult life. Some of the vaccines on the market reduce clinical signs and mortality due to parvovirus, but they do not prevent shedding after infection occurs – this means the animal will still excrete the virus into the environment. Unfortunately, canine parvovirus is very stable in the environment, so any animal which sheds the virus not only contaminates the environment, but poses a risk to other animals as well.

You'll be pleased to know that some vaccines use a special strain (called C154) that sets the standard in terms of protection against canine parvovirus. It has proven protection against both types of virus (CPV-2a and CPV-2b) and offers a duration of immunity of three years. This means your dog is protected for a full three years against parvovirus.