

Points on Pets: Parvovirus thrives where dogs gather

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: We are concerned about our dog. We heard that the boarding kennel where our dog frequently stays had an outbreak of parvovirus about three weeks ago. Although our dog has been vaccinated for all of the common canine diseases as recommended by our veterinarian, we are still worried about this possible exposure.

We are also dismayed that the owners of the boarding kennel did not contact us as soon as they knew about the problem.

How long is the incubation period for parvovirus in dogs? Is there anything that we can do at this time to protect our dog from getting the disease? He seems to be normal and does not have any signs of illness.

A: Your concern about the possible exposure of your dog to parvovirus is justified. Although it seems like parvovirus is not talked about often, it is still a serious disease in unvaccinated dogs.

Most dogs susceptible to parvovirus usually begin showing signs of the disease within five to seven days following exposure. Early signs of parvovirus include depression, loss of appetite, vomiting and severe diarrhea. Dehydration usually occurs rapidly because of the diarrhea and vomiting. Most of the deaths due to parvovirus occur within the first 48 to 72 hours following the first noticeable signs of the disease.

The histories of the cases and the clinical signs seen in sick dogs are the basis for diagnosing parvovirus. The spreading of severe diarrhea and vomiting among susceptible dogs are strong indicators of the disease. Laboratory tests can be performed by veterinarians to confirm the diagnosis.

There are no specific treatments effective for parvovirus. Most veterinarians administer fluids to counter the dehydration as well as medications to decrease the diarrhea and vomiting. Antibiotics are often given to reduce the chance of secondary bacterial infections.

The administration of routine vaccinations against parvovirus is the best protection. Annual boosters should be given. Parvovirus can survive for several months in dirty environments. Therefore, routine cleaning and disinfection of kennels and other areas where dogs have contact with each other is essential.

Parvovirus is spread between dogs through contaminated feces. Therefore, it is extremely important that all dog owners pick up after their dogs. Your veterinarian can give you additional advice regarding the protection of your dog from parvovirus.

Q: We are relatively new horse owners. Someone told us to not use walnut shavings in our barn; however, they did not know why.

Can you fill us in?

A: It is true that walnut shavings and walnut sawdust should not be used for horse bedding. Bedding containing as little as 5 percent black walnut can cause severe laminitis in horses.

There are reports of horses dying when housed in stalls containing higher percentages of walnut shavings and dust. Horses have to ingest the walnut shavings or dust to become poisoned. Contact alone usually does not cause problems.

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