

# Beware of a Puppy Killer!

Article and Photos by Quixote Humane, Inc.

Our environment is filled with all kinds of unseen life, some beneficial and some deadly. One of the most common threats to the health of your unvaccinated dog is a virus that is spread by contact with feces, saliva or vomit from an infected dog. The Parvovirus can be carried on shoes, tires, clothes, animal fur, flies, rodents, and even the wind and water. It takes only 1,000 units to infect a dog, a single ounce of fecal matter from a parvo-infected dog contains 35,000,000 units of the virus!

Direct contact of a dilution of one part bleach to thirty parts water will kill parvovirus, but any organic material (dirt, grass, feces, food, etc) will inactivate the solution. Though sunlight and dry conditions have some effect, parvovirus is very durable in the environment and can persist for months or even years.

When an unvaccinated dog inhales or ingests the virus, it attacks the lymph nodes of the throat and then makes its way into the bloodstream to the bone marrow and intestinal cells. Usually within three to seven days of exposure, symptoms including: loss of appetite, vomiting, fever, depression, dehydration, and diarrhea appear. Without extreme intervention the dog will die from dehydration or secondary infections.

A nursing mother, that is resistant to the disease, passes a temporary immunity to her pups. These antibodies fade from the pup's system and must be replaced by vaccination. However, if vaccinated while still carrying the maternal antibodies, the vaccination will be prevented from working properly. That is why veterinarians recommend vaccinating as early as three weeks of age and then additional vaccinations every two to four weeks, until the pups are sixteen weeks old. If they are exposed to parvovirus at anytime before they have developed immunity, they can become infected.

Proper vaccination usually prevents Parvo in adult dogs but they can still carry it on their feet and fur. Some breeds, including Husky, Doberman, German Shepherd, Retriever, Rottweiler and Pitbulls are particularly susceptible to Parvo. Vulnerable breeds may need additional protection until six months of age.



The success in treating parvo-infected dogs depends on early diagnosis. Like the common cold, there is no cure for the virus, but supportive care can help some puppies survive. Veterinary treatment may include: IV fluids to re-hydrate, medications to reduce diarrhea and vomiting and antibiotics to prevent secondary infections. Once a dog recovers and goes home he can still shed the virus in his feces for up to two weeks.

According to UC Davis Companion Animal Health "Adult dogs may get a mild form of the disease that is indistinguishable from any other cause of diarrhea." Anyone who comes in contact with a large number of dogs in public should be aware that they can bring the virus home and expose their animals to this deadly disease..

If your property has been contaminated by a dog with Parvo you must clean all surfaces which the dog came in contact. A ratio of 1 part bleach with 30 parts water will disinfect non-porous surfaces, however, it will not disinfect adsorbent materials such as carpet and natural fibers. Sunlight, and dry heat will kill the virus sooner than areas in shade and high moisture. It is virtually impossible to disinfect dirt and grass, so no vulnerable dogs should be allowed in contaminated yards for three to six months.

Laundry with bleach will kill the virus on clothing. Shoes, gloves, tools, etc. need to be dipped in the bleach solution. Wash your hands and cloths after handling other dogs or contaminated materials - including door handles and animal bedding.

Legitimate rescue organizations and quality breeders vaccinate their puppies and dogs against Parvovirus, as well as several other common canine diseases. If you purchase a dog from a rescue or a breeder, be sure to ask for its vaccination record and keep your dogs up to date on all his shots. Some backyard and accidental breeders do not do the necessary puppy shots and leave the puppies vulnerable to infections. Again, request copies of veterinary history and vaccination records.

Some breeders and owners attempt to prevent diseases, but try save money by buying the vaccines from feed stores or mail order and vaccinate the dogs themselves. However, if they do not keep the vaccine at the proper temperature or hold them past their expiration date the vaccine may be ineffective.

Proper prevention is a small price to pay compared to the expense of Parvo treatment, or worse, the unnecessary death of a beloved pet. As soon as you buy or adopt a new pet make an appointment with your veterinarian for an initial exam. Bring all previous vaccination records and a brief history of the dog: when and where purchased, any changes in his appetite, changes in activity level and any unhealthy symptoms.

If you have had a pet die unexpectedly that showed symptoms of parvo clean your property, be careful of handling other animals and wait six months before bringing another susceptible pet home, and, tell your family and friends so they can protect their pets from contracting the deadly parvovirus.

The animals pictured below are only available for three days, but there are plenty of other choices! Visit the Valencia County Shelter, 1209 NM 314, one mile south of Main Street in Los Lunas. Open 8:00 am - 4:00 pm Tues - Sat. 866-2479