



# FATAL DISEASES OF DOGS

- : CANINE DISTEMPER**
- : CANINE PARVOVIRUS**
- : CANINE HEPATITIS**

These three major infectious diseases of dogs in Australasia are widespread and highly contagious. Distemper and Infectious Hepatitis have been present for many years. Parvovirus first appeared overseas in 1978 and within 12 months had spread worldwide. For all three diseases, treatment is difficult, expensive and often unsuccessful. The only effective means of protection is vaccination to stimulate the body's natural defences.

## **DISTEMPER:**

The earliest sign of this disease is a fever lasting for 2-3 days which recurs about a week later. Dogs of any age may be affected but young dogs are the most susceptible. The clinical signs vary from dog to dog- fever, respiratory symptoms (coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge), eye discharge, vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of appetite, listlessness and dehydration. Nervous signs such as muscle tremors, convulsions, loss of balance and progressive paralysis usually occur later in the course of the disease. The recovery rate, even with careful treatment, is fairly low. Dogs who have recovered from an episode of distemper may develop permanent nervous problems late in life.

### **How can dogs be protected?**

Dogs can be protected by being kept in complete isolation. This may be sufficient to protect pups until they have been vaccinated but it is impractical for older dogs. Vaccination by a vet is the only reliable method of preventing infection. Distemper vaccination is very effective but must be done before the dog is exposed to the disease. Infection can be present for two or three weeks before signs appear. Vaccination of dogs already incubating Distemper will not prevent the disease and in such animals disease symptoms can appear a short time after vaccinations.

### **Pups under 12 weeks of age:**

Protection of very young pups presents a special problem. Bitches immune to Distemper, through previous vaccination or exposure to the disease, have a level of protective antibody circulating in the blood. The antibody not only protects the bitch, it is also passed on to the pup through the first milk to provide immunity for a limited time up to 12 weeks. The presence of this circulating antibody in the pup can also lead to neutralization of the Distemper vaccine virus, rendering it ineffective.

### **Three methods can be used to overcome the problem of protecting pups under 12 weeks old:**

1. The use of combined Measles distemper vaccine is the most effective means of immunizing young pups. A canine vaccine based on Measles virus (directly related to Distemper) has the ability to protect even when the Distemper antibody is present. This is normally used in pups about 6 weeks of age. It has been combined with distemper vaccine to provide a fail-safe vaccine in case the Distemper vaccine fails due to the presence of antibody in the vaccinated pup, the Measles vaccine will be successful and if the level of antibody drops sufficiently the pup will respond to the Distemper vaccine. The Measles vaccine does not provide long term immunity, revaccination is necessary to prolong protection.
2. **Repeat Vaccination:** Using this method, the pup is given repeated vaccinations with Distemper vaccine at 12 weeks. This is an effective way of obtaining immunity in the pup with minimum risk.
3. **Isolation:** The pup is kept isolated until is over 12 week when vaccinated. The isolation is continued for two weeks to allow for complete immunization. . I like to give another shot at 16 weeks but check with your veterinarian.
- 4.

### **PARVOVIRUS:**

Canine Parvovirus is a “new disease” which first occurred in the U.S.A. in early 1978. It soon established in Australia, New Zealand and Europe and the rest of the world.

Parvovirus is very persistent in the environment. It is resistant to destruction by many common disinfectants and normal climatic extremes of temperature.

The virus is present in the dropping of infected dogs. It can survive 6-12 months in droppings which are protected from drying. Decontamination of infected kennels must commence with thorough scrubbing to remove all traces of droppings before disinfectant is used. **A reliable disinfectant against Parvovirus is a solution of Parvocide.**

Since the virus is so resistant, it may be spread not only by infected dogs, but also by anything contaminated food utensils, bedding, shoes, clothes and hand of owners and dog attendants and other equipment.

Kennels in isolated country locations have been penetrated by the infection. Even pet dogs isolated by careful owners can be affected by the disease, because the virus can be brought accidentally into the dog’s environment.

#### **The Disease:**

Two forms of Canine Parvovirus exists:

1. Parvoviral Enteritis This causes diarrhea, often with blood in the motions, vomiting, abdominal pain, fever, loss of appetite and extreme depression. It is often accompanied by rapid dehydration and collapse. Dogs of any age may be affected but fatalities are more common in young dogs under 6 months of age.
2. Parvoviral Myocarditis this occurs mainly in unprotected, very young pups, infected at or before birth. The heart muscle is affected and death is usually sudden in apparently healthy pups.

#### **How can we protect our dogs?**

Protection by vaccination is recommended for all dogs and pups. A single vaccination provides reliable protection to dogs and pups over 16 weeks of age for at least 12 months. However, pups may be at risk before 16 weeks of age, The presence of antibodies which the young pup received from its mother may inhibit the effectiveness of the vaccine up to 16 weeks.

Repeat vaccination against Parvovirus are recommended from 6-8 weeks of age until the pup is at least 16 weeks old. A Booster is recommended annually.

## HEPATITIS:

This is highly contagious and often fatal viral infection.

The virus is excreted by infected dogs in early stages of the disease. In some dogs the virus may continue to be excreted in the urine for up to 6 months following infection.

**THE DISEASE:** Clinical signs may vary from mild to severe. Often the disease causes sudden death. In less severe attacks, high fever, loss of appetite, abdominal pain and possible jaundice, are seen.

After recovery, dogs may develop “blue eye” (cloudiness of the cornea of the eye). This may be temporary or permanent.

Chronic hepatitis may persist after the disease. Dogs so afflicted may lose weight and fail to thrive.

The disease is also responsible for many cases of kidney failure in later life. Recovered dogs may spread the infection to others for up to 6 months after.

Dogs of any age may be affected. The severe form of the disease is rare in dogs over 2 years old.

**PROTECTION:** Canine infectious Hepatitis is difficult to treat. It is however readily prevented by vaccination.

Canine Infectious Hepatitis Vaccine is routinely administered in combination with Distemper and Parvovirus vaccine. Annual booster vaccination are recommended.

## PARAINFLUENZA:

This is a highly contagious viral infection that is part of the Kennel Cough complex. Although not a fatal disease it is included here as it is a troublesome complaint and vaccination for it is part of the thorough vaccination programme for puppies

AGE	VACCINATION AGAINST	
6 – 8 weeks	Distemper Parvovirus Hepatitis	For temporary protection Against early exposure
12 – 14 weeks	Distemper Hepatitis Parvovirus Parainfluenza	Permanent protection Against Distemper and Hepatitis requires one Vaccination after 12 weeks Of age. Programmes will Vary with age of first Vaccination.
16 – 18 weeks	Distemper Hepatitis Parvovirus Parainfluenza	

These are guidelines only. Check with your Veterinarian.