

# What Every Puppy Owner Needs to Know About Parvo in Puppies

*Anna Burke*

The last thing any new puppy owner or [dog breeder](#) wants to hear is a diagnosis of parvo. Parvo in puppies is unfortunately a common disease with deadly consequences, which is why it is important for anyone dealing with puppies on a regular basis to be aware of the symptoms of parvo and what to do about it.

Parvo in puppies is caused by the canine parvovirus. This virus is highly contagious and spreads through direct contact with an infected dog or by indirect contact with a contaminated object. Your puppy is exposed to the parvovirus every time he sniffs, licks, or [consumes infected feces](#). Indirect transmission occurs when a person who has recently been exposed to an infected dog touches your puppy, or when a puppy encounters a contaminated object, like a [food or water bowl](#), collars and leashes, and the hands and clothing of people who handle infected dogs. That's why it's so important to use a [parvo disinfectant](#).

The [Merck Veterinary Manual](#) classifies the virus as a disease of the stomach and small intestines, as this is where the virus does the most damage. The virus prefers to infect the small intestine, where it destroys cells, impairs absorption, and disrupts the gut barrier. Parvo in puppies also affects the bone marrow and lymphopoietic tissues, and in some cases can also affect the heart.

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## Why Do Puppies Get Parvo?

Puppies ages six weeks to six months are the most susceptible to parvo. Puppies younger than six weeks old still retain some of their mother's antibodies, assuming that the dam received her full series of parvo vaccinations. Puppies are [vaccinated against parvo](#) at approximately 6, 8, and 12 weeks of age. They are vulnerable to the disease until they have received all three shots in their vaccination series, which means owners need to take extra precaution during this time to prevent their puppies from contracting the virus. Puppies should receive a dose of canine parvovirus vaccine between 14 and 16 weeks of age, regardless of how many doses they received earlier, to develop adequate protection.

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The severity of parvo cases varies. The stress of weaning can lead to a more severe case of parvo in puppies, as stress weakens the immune system. A combination of parvo and a secondary infection or a parasite can also lead to a more severe case of parvo in puppies.

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To top it off, certain breeds of dogs are at an increased risk of parvo:

[Rottweilers](#)

[Doberman Pinschers](#)

[American Staffordshire Terriers](#)

[English Springer Spaniels](#)

[German Shepherd Dogs](#)

[Labrador Retrievers](#)

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## **How Long Are Puppies With Parvo Contagious?**

Puppies and adult dogs with parvo start shedding the virus within 4 to 5 days of exposure.

Unfortunately for conscientious owners, this time period does not always coincide with the first parvo symptoms, which means dogs can be contagious before owners even realize that they are sick. Puppies with parvo continue to shed the virus for up to 10 days after clinical recovery, so be sure to keep any puppies recovering from parvo away from unvaccinated and partially vaccinated dogs.

Outside of your dog, the virus can survive indoors for at least one month, and outdoors it can survive for many months and even a year under the right conditions. Use a [cleaner proven to kill parvovirus](#). Talk to your vet about the best way to remove the parvovirus from your home environment or kennels.

## **Symptoms of Parvo in Puppies**

A puppy with parvo is a very sick dog. The sooner you catch the early signs of the virus in puppies, the

sooner you can get your dog to the vet. Since parvo is common in young puppies, you should call your vet any time your puppy is feeling under the weather, but you should also be aware of the specific symptoms of parvo in puppies:

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[Bloody diarrhea](#)

[Vomiting](#)

[Fever](#)

Lethargy

Loss of appetite

Weight loss

Weakness

Dehydration

Depression

All of these symptoms are serious by themselves and could be a sign of parvo or another serious illness. You should contact your vet immediately if you suspect your puppy has parvo, and be sure to notify the vet's staff ahead of time of your suspicions and your puppy's symptoms so that they can take the appropriate quarantine procedures to prevent your puppy from infecting other dogs.

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## **Treating Parvo in Puppies**

Your vet will diagnose parvo based on clinical signs and blood work. She may also run a test called an ELISA to search for virus antigens in your dog's feces and will perform additional diagnostic testing as needed.

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There is no cure for parvo. Your vet will offer your puppy [supportive care](#) over the course of the