

What Is Parvovirus?

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When you get a new puppy it can be tempting to take them out right away and show them off. But before you do, make sure they've had their complete series of parvovirus vaccinations.

Parvovirus can be deadly for dogs. It's one of the biggest [dangers](#) to puppies and young dogs.

Also called canine parvovirus or parvo, parvovirus is a highly infectious virus that affects dogs. It was first noticed in 1978 in Europe. It mainly affects a dog's small intestines but in young puppies, it can also affect the heart.

The disease attacks the small intestine lining, causing it to stop replicating effectively. This makes it impossible for young dogs to absorb nutrients and it allows other bacteria in the intestines to infect the rest of their body.

Puppies between the ages of six weeks and six months are most vulnerable to parvo, as are certain dog breeds, including:

German Shepherds

Rottweilers

Doberman Pinschers

American Staffordshire Terriers

English Spaniels

Parvovirus is most often spread through exposure to the feces of infected dogs. Dogs that have parvo generally don't develop symptoms for three to seven days, but they can still be infectious. That means that exposure to any dog's waste can potentially expose your pet to parvo.

Parvo can survive indoors for up to a month. Yet, outdoors it can live in soil for as long as a year. That means if a dog contagious with parvo went to a public space in the past year, your puppy could contract the disease there. This is why it's recommended that puppy owners don't take their new pets out in public until they get all four vaccinations and build up their immunity. It is recommended to begin vaccination at six weeks followed by a vaccination every three weeks until your puppy is 16

weeks old.

The first noticeable symptoms of parvovirus is usually unexpected [tiredness or lethargy](#). Next, your dog may lose their appetite as the virus attacks their small intestine lining. Shortly after, they will spike a sudden fever and begin to have diarrhea and [vomiting](#).

While these symptoms are common to parvo, they can also be the result of other conditions. If your dog has bloody diarrhea, contact your vet immediately to get them tested and treated.

Because parvo can be deadly, the goal should be to prevent infection, not to treat it afterward.

Since it's a virus, it can't be treated with antibiotics. Instead, most veterinarians focus on treating the symptoms so that the dog's own immune system can work to fight off the invaders. In most cases, dogs with parvovirus will need to spend time at a veterinary hospital to get the care they need.

Treatment may include:

Intravenous fluids (IV) to replace those lost to diarrhea

Blood transfusions to help keep blood cell counts high

Anti-nausea and anti-diarrheal medications to help dogs retain fluids

Antibiotics if the dog has come down with secondary infections

Adult dogs usually recover from parvo if they get the right treatment. Healthy and strong puppies may survive if treated early.

There are two important ways you can work to prevent the spread of parvo, both to your own dog and to others. First, if your dog is old enough, make sure they get their parvovirus vaccine series. It can prevent most dogs from catching parvo at all, and dogs that do catch it will have milder cases.

Widespread vaccinations against this virus is why parvovirus today is an occasional risk instead of a constant plague. Puppies should always receive all four vaccinations starting at six weeks to make sure they build immunity as early as possible.

Second, if your puppy is too young for the vaccine, if you believe your dog may have been exposed to parvo, or has symptoms of parvo, keep them away from other dogs and public places and take them to their vet right away. The simplest way to keep your dog safe from [getting sick](#) is to prevent them from ever coming into contact with parvo in the first place.