

Distemper! What is it?

Distemper is a virus that is spread through the air via exhaling or sneezing, and is very common, so few dogs will escape exposure although most escape the disease. It commonly affects puppies and young dogs.

It is only after an initial six to nine day incubation period that symptoms are likely to show. Initially the dog will develop a fever and become unwell. The dog will then appear normal for a period of three days to a week, after which the typical symptoms of distemper will arise; fever, loss of appetite and energy with a mild discharge from the eyes. The condition then advances with more symptoms, like severe conjunctivitis, diarrhoea and sores on the tummy and behind the back legs. Encephalitis is an advanced side effect of the disease.

Prevention

Puppies should be vaccinated against distemper as part of their puppy vaccinations, and it should also be included in their one year boosters. After vaccinating the immunity should be lifelong, although you can titre test (see below) immunity levels to check whether your dog is still immune. Any new dog that comes into your family that is older than a puppy, should be titer tested and/or vaccinated.

Please make sure that all puppies and young dogs have their vaccines. The required vaccines are listed below:-

6 and 8 weeks (8 weeks preferred)	Recommended start of vaccine program
8 Weeks	Parvovirus
11 weeks	Parvovirus / Distemper/Leptospirosis
14 weeks	Parvovirus / Distemper/ Leptospirosis
14 weeks and three days	Only now is puppy safe to go out with feet on the ground.
16 weeks	Rabies and follow up parvovirus
12 months	Booster required. Legally the rabies MUST be given annually

There are many stray dogs around who are probably unvaccinated and it is a big risk to keep your dog unprotected.

Treatment

Antibiotics, fluids and other drugs will be available from your veterinarian and will enable your dog to fully recover if it is caught soon enough and if the advanced side effects are not allowed to develop.

Alternatives include, fasting your dog – serving only pure water and a mixed vegetable broth. Vitamin C is an important aid to recovery in this and other viruses. Special eye care will be needed, bathing the lids in a saline solution to make them more comfortable for your dog.

Homeopathic solutions are in the form of Distemperinum 30C, Natrum muriaticum 30C, Pulsantilla, Arsenicum album 30C, Hydrastis Canadensis and Psorinum 30C.

Recovery

Usually in a few days to a week if properly treated and if the distemper is not too severe.

What is Titer testing?

We all know that we have to keep up with our annual boosters in order to protect our pets. But some of these vaccines actually give immunity for up to three years: and after the age of about 10 a regularly boosted dog will have enough immunity to cover it through its remaining years.

So the question to ask is whether to keep boosting your dog annually if it may already have the immunity. This is where the titre comes in. Titering measures how much immunity an animal has to a particular disease, and they are available at your vets for 30-40€. It is up to you whether you choose to vaccinate every year or to titer test before deciding. Find out what vaccines your vet uses and do some background research, in books or the internet. Find out how long the protection lasts and what is in the vaccine.

Please make sure that your cat or dog is healthy before vaccinating. If your pet is ill or recovering from an operation, then postpone the vaccination until they are well again.

Protect your pet with knowledge

Julie Pickering

Copyright © Paws 4 Pets 2006