

Canine Parvovirus, A.K.A. “Parvo”

What is Parvo?

Canine Parvovirus is an extremely hardy virus that is very contagious to unvaccinated or freshly vaccinated dogs and puppies. Without early intervention it can be devastating, as well as deadly. The virus can enter into the environment from the animal before they even display symptoms. It is hard to kill, lives a long time in the environment, and is easily spread. Thankfully, this virus cannot go between species and affects only canines.

What are the symptoms of Parvo?

If puppies stop eating or become less interested in eating, that is typically the first sign of Parvo. Other symptoms include decreased activity to lethargy, diarrhea, diarrhea with blood, and vomiting. Sometimes symptoms are glaringly obvious, but sometimes they are more subtle. While not common in our adult dogs, they can also be affected by Parvo.

Situational examples of symptoms:

1. **Attitude/Activity change:** They can go from running around your house to just meandering around, or simply just not running around as excitedly.
2. **Appetite loss:** They scarf down a bowl of food that morning or the night prior but their next meal they only eat half the bowl, if at all.
3. **Stool change:** Stool is even becoming softer and darker in texture, or they seem to be uncomfortable while going to the bathroom. Or, their stool suddenly becomes diarrhea with an odd, sweeter smell to it.

It's important to monitor your dog's daily health, note any changes and report them as soon as they are noticed.

I have dogs at home!

If your dogs get their yearly distemper vaccine on time, which protects them from Parvovirus, and have a good track record of their vaccines throughout their life, they will likely be fine! However, it is highly suggested to avoid having any unvaccinated dogs or puppies in your home, near your Parvo puppy, or visiting your home until your foster is cleared and no longer has Parvo. Even then, everything should be cleaned appropriately, including any fabric items, like carpets, couches, or anything else that your foster came in contact with before you have dog visitors.

If your own pet is not vaccinated, or is coming up on being due on their vaccine, please email the Foster Veterinary Technician and we can further discuss what to do to help your pets stay safe and how we can assist with that. If your animal were to test positive for Parvo, you must seek treatment with your primary veterinarian, as we will not be able to provide treatment.

Indirect spread of Parvo

You and your home can be a fomite for Parvo. A fomite is an object or material that can carry infection. This includes clothes you wear and furniture the puppy has come in contact with. For example, if a parvo puppy is shedding the virus but not showing symptoms, yet gave you a bunch of kisses and slobbered all over your hands and clothes, and you go into another room and touch other items or sit on a couch, the virus can shed from you onto the couch or other items you touched. If that happens, then there is a chance that now the Parvo virus is waiting on your couch or other objects for the next unvaccinated dog or puppy to come around, touch it and get infected with it. This is why we recommend not having any unvaccinated dogs or puppies in your home for at least 6 months. If they were outside or on your deck, you should wait at least a year, as Parvo thrives outdoors.

Monitoring and Reporting

It is extremely important to report any symptoms of Parvo you see in your fosters, especially puppies, including any changes in their attitude. We want to intervene as soon as possible! The sooner we are able to intervene, the better the outcome for all of the dogs involved. We would rather check your foster pet and have it turn out to be nothing serious, versus holding off and seeing them when it is too late.

If you have been informed that your foster puppy has been exposed to Parvo, be on high alert for symptoms. If you notice the slightest change in attitude, appetite, or appearance in stool, please let the Foster Veterinary Technician know immediately. If the tech is out, please follow the emergency protocol.

If your puppy has tested positive for Parvo, they will stay at the shelter if possible (the only exception being neonates who need round-the-clock care) to start treatment until our veterinarian gives them the okay to go back to foster. Sometimes this is within a day, and sometimes it's a week later. It all depends on the severity of their illness and their response to treatments. The sooner we can catch it, the better and quicker the recovery in most cases. If you are willing to take your Parvo puppy back, please know you may need to visit multiple times in a week if they decline different days of the week but are okay during others. They may need to come in for a night stay, or may just need a short visit to get a couple treatments, and then go back home with you.