

Two Essential Vaccines? Skip One, but Not the Other

Your vet may tell you that your dog or puppy needs both of these, but here, I explain why I don't believe it's necessary. As long as this second infection isn't present, your dog will likely show no symptoms from the other mild, yet highly contagious virus.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Canine coronavirus (CCV) is a highly contagious but relatively mild disease when it occurs alone, meaning the dog has no other intestinal infections at the same time
- Dogs at higher risk for acquiring CCV are those who are trained intensively or live in overcrowded or unsanitary conditions
- Adult dogs with a CCV infection often have no symptoms. However, very young puppies can become seriously ill with coronavirus, with severe diarrhea and dehydration
- If CCV is present simultaneously with parvovirus, the prognosis for the animal's recovery, especially if it's a puppy, is not good
- I don't recommend the CCV vaccine, however, I do encourage puppy owners to ensure their pet is immunized against parvovirus

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Despite what vaccine manufacturers and even some veterinarians would have you believe, canine coronavirus (CCV), while highly contagious, is a mild condition when it occurs alone. It's when coronavirus is present along with parvovirus or another intestinal infection that it becomes a serious risk to a dog's health.

CCV is second only to parvo as a viral cause of diarrhea in puppies. It's an intestinal disease specific to canines, and is found in both wild and domestic dogs all over the world. The disease has been around for decades, and most adult domestic dogs have measurable CCV antibody titers. This means they were exposed to the virus at some time in their life, or were vaccinated against it as puppies, and they carry lifelong protection from that point forward.

How Coronavirus Is Transmitted

The coronavirus is spread from dog to dog through exposure to the poop of infected dogs. Infected dogs can shed the virus in feces for up to six months. CCV resides within the upper two-thirds of the small intestine, where it replicates itself, as well as in local lymph nodes.

Stress increases susceptibility to a CCV infection, so dogs that are trained intensively, live in overcrowded environments or unsanitary conditions, or spend time in locations where lots of dogs gather are at higher risk.

Symptoms of a CCV Infection

In adult dogs, a coronavirus infection often has no symptoms. Occasionally, a dog may experience a single episode of vomiting or a few days of explosive diarrhea. There may also be a temporary loss of appetite or depression. Very rarely, there may also be fever or mild respiratory symptoms.

Puppies, especially those under 12 weeks of age, are at much greater risk for serious illness than adult dogs, and may suffer from prolonged diarrhea and dehydration. If infected only with coronavirus, most puppies will recover after several days of mild to severe diarrhea.

However, puppies infected with both coronavirus and parvovirus will develop severe enteritis (inflammation of the small intestine), and sadly, these two simultaneous infections are fatal for many puppies.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Canine Coronavirus

Because the symptoms of a coronavirus infection are similar to those seen in other types of gastrointestinal infections, your vet will need to perform specific serum or antibody titer tests to diagnose coronavirus.

Puppies infected with coronavirus must be carefully monitored. Even a relatively small amount of diarrhea or vomiting can be fatal for a small puppy. That's why it's very important to keep CCV patients, especially puppies, from developing dehydration. Water or specially prepared fluids can be administered under the skin (subcutaneously) and/or intravenously to prevent dehydration.

Fortunately, most adult dogs recover from a CCV infection without the need for medical treatment or fluid therapy. In some cases, diarrhea can last up to 12 days, and soft stools for several weeks. During this time, colostrum, homeopathic remedies, and slippery elm bark can all be very beneficial.

Because CCV is highly contagious, if your dog is symptomatic or has been diagnosed with the virus, he should be immediately isolated from other dogs. It's also important to keep your dog's crate or sleeping area clean and hygienic, and remember to always pick up after your dog and keep him from coming in contact with the feces of other dogs.

There is a vaccine for coronavirus, but I don't recommend it. Vaccine expert Dr. Ronald Schultz calls it "a vaccine in search of a disease" and feels that it has very little value. That's because alone, coronavirus is not a serious infection.

As long as your dog has received a well-timed parvovirus vaccine, there's really no reason to be overly concerned about a coronavirus infection.

Protecting Your Dog From Parvovirus

As most dog parents know, parvovirus is a serious disease that is too often fatal. Since coronavirus becomes deadly in combination with parvo, it's another reason to ensure your dog is vaccinated against the latter.

While it's true that over-vaccination is a problem in the veterinary community, it doesn't mean we should forego giving baseline protection against parvo (two puppy vaccines) to give dogs lifetime immunity against this deadly disease.

The protocol I follow in vaccinating puppies against parvo (the vaccine protects against all strains) is a parvo/distemper shot before 11 weeks of age (ideally at 9 weeks), and a booster at about 14 weeks. I then run antibody titer tests between 2 to 4 weeks after the second shot to insure the puppy was not only vaccinated, but immunized.

This is a core vaccine protocol that provides the minimum number of vaccines to protect against life threatening illnesses, without over vaccinating.

Since the job of vaccines is to stimulate antibody production, if a puppy is exposed to parvo (or another virus for which he's been vaccinated), he has some level of circulating protection. Vaccines stimulate antibody production, but it takes 10 to 14 days after the vaccination for adequate protection to occur.

A small percentage of dogs known as non-responders will not develop immunity and will remain susceptible to parvo all their lives. This is very important information for dog owners to have, which is another reason I titer after the second round of shots.

In addition, some puppies retain a level of immunity from their mother's milk that interferes with the effectiveness of vaccines. Titering gives us the information we need to be confident the pup has been immunized effectively, or if he hasn't, to determine why, and what further action should be taken. I also always provide a homeopathic detox agent for newly vaccinated animals.
