

Canine Coronavirus Infection

By Dr. Karen Becker

Hi, this is Dr. Karen Becker, and today we're going to discuss canine coronavirus. Despite what some vaccine manufacturers and even some veterinarians would have us believe, canine coronavirus or CCV, while highly contagious, is actually a very mild condition when it occurs alone. It's when coronavirus is present along with parvo 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 that's specific to canines and is found in both wild and domestic dogs all over the world. The disease has been around for decades. Most adult domestic dogs have measurable CCV antibody titers, meaning they were exposed to the virus at some time in their life or vaccinated against it as a puppy, and they carry lifelong protection after that point.

Risks and Symptoms

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 CCV infection. Dogs that are trained extensively, that live in overcrowded environments or unsanitary conditions, or that spend time in locations where lots of dogs gather together are obviously at a higher risk.

In adult dogs, a CCV infection oftentimes 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 a 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 or inflammation of the small intestine, and sadly the infections can become fatal for many puppies.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Because the symptoms of coronavirus are so similar to other types of infections that causes GI problems, your vet will need to perform specific serum or antibody titer tests to diagnose a CCV infection.

Puppies infected with coronavirus will need to be carefully monitored. Even a relatively small amount of diarrhea or vomiting can be fatal for a very small puppy. That's why it's very important to keep CCV patients, especially puppies, from developing dehydration. 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 stool for the next few weeks. During this time colostrum, homeopathic remedies, and slippery elm bark can all be very beneficial.

Because CCV is highly contagious, dogs that are symptomatic or have been diagnosed with the virus should be immediately isolated from other dogs. It's also important to keep your dog's crate or sleeping area clean and hygienic. 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. Dr. Ronald Schultz calls it "a vaccine in search of a disease," and feels that it absolutely has not a whole lot of value. That's because alone, coronavirus is not a serious infection. As long as your dog has received a well-timed parvovirus vaccine, there're really not a reason to be overly concerned about a coronavirus infection.

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