Critters Corner presents:

What you should know about

Canine Parvovirus

What is Parvovirus infection?

Canine parvovirus is a highly contagious and serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the gastrointestinal tract of puppies, dogs, and wild canids. It was first identified in 1978 and is seen worldwide. It also can damage the heart muscle in very young and unborn puppies

How is Parvovirus spread?

Puppies and dogs usually become infected when they ingest virus that is passed in the feces (stool) of an infected dog. Canine parvovirus is resistant to changes in environmental conditions and can survive for long periods of time. Trace amounts of feces containing parvovirus may serve as reservoirs of infection and the virus is readily transmitted from place to place on the hair or feet of dogs or via contaminated cages, shoes, or other objects.

What dogs are at risk?

All dogs are at risk, but puppies less than four months old and dogs that have not been vaccinated against canine parvovirus are at increased risk of acquiring the disease. Certain breeds (e.g. Rottweiler and Doberman Pinscher) appear to have a high risk of experiencing severe disease.

What are some signs of Parvovirus infection?

Canine parvovirus causes lethargy; loss of appetite; fever; vomiting; and severe, often bloody, diarrhea. Vomiting and diarrhea can cause rapid dehydration, and most deaths from parvovirus occur within 48 to 72 hours following onset of clinical signs. If your puppy or dog shows any of these signs, you should contact your veterinarian promptly.

How is Parvovirus diagnosed and treated?

Veterinarians diagnose canine parvovirus on the basis of clinical appearance and laboratory tests. No specific drug is available that will kill the virus in infected dogs. Treatment should be started immediately and consists primarily of efforts to combat dehydration by replacing electrolyte and fluid losses, controlling vomiting and diarrhea, and preventing secondary infections. Sick dogs should be kept warm, receive good

nursing care, and be separated from other dogs. Proper cleaning and disinfection of contaminated kennels and other areas where infected dogs are housed is essential to control the spread of parvovirus. Canine parvovirus is not easily killed, so consult your veterinarian for specific guidance on cleaning and disinfecting agents.

How is Parvovirus prevented?

Vaccination— Vaccination is important. Young puppies are very susceptible to infection, particularly because the natural immunity provided in their mothers' milk may wear off before the puppies' own immune systems are mature enough to fight off infection. If a puppy is exposed to canine parvovirus during this gap in protection, it may become ill. An additional concern is that immunity provided by a mother's milk may interfere with an effective response to vaccination. This means even vaccinated puppies may occasionally succumb to parvovirus. To narrow gaps in protection and provide optimal protection against parvovirus during the first few months of life, a series of puppy vaccinations are administered. To protect their adult dogs, pet owners should be sure that their dog's parvovirus vaccination is up-to-date. Ask your veterinarian about a recommended vaccination program for your canine companion. In spite of proper vaccination, a small percentage of dogs do not develop protective immunity and remain susceptible to infection.

Hygiene— Until a puppy has received its complete series of vaccinations, pet owners should use caution when bringing their pet to places where young puppies congregate (e.g. pet shops, parks, puppy classes, obedience classes, doggy daycare, and grooming establishments). Reputable establishments and training programs reduce exposure risk by requiring vaccinations, health examinations, good hygiene, and isolation of ill puppies and dogs. Contact with known infected dogs and their premises should always be avoided. Finally, do not allow your puppy or dog to come into contact with the fecal waste of other dogs while walking or playing outdoors. Prompt and proper disposal of waste material is always advisable as a way to limit spread of canine parvovirus infection.