

Canine Herpes Virus

Canine herpes virus (CHV), also known as “fading puppy syndrome,” is a viral infection that infects the reproductive organs of adult dogs. While adult dogs infected with CHV usually do not show any symptoms, the infection is the leading cause of death in newborn puppies. One puppy in a litter may be affected, and death may occur abruptly, with little or no warning, or an entire litter may perish within a 24-hour period. If the disease is contracted when the puppies are older than three weeks, it is often less severe. Older puppies have a much better chance of survival, but may have long-term effects of a persistent CHV infection.

Transmitted

Canine herpes virus lives in the reproductive and respiratory tracts of male and female dogs. In adults, the disease is transmitted via aerosol and direct contact, including sneezing, coughing, nosing, sniffing, licking and sexual activities between an infected and an uninfected dog. Puppies usually contract the disease in the birth canal or from nasal and oral secretions of the mother shortly after birth. Puppies can also spread the virus to one another. Just because one puppy in a litter is infected with CHV does not mean they all are.

Symptoms of Canine Herpes in Adult Dogs

- Often there aren't any symptoms
- Occasionally raised genital sores may be seen
- Abortion
- Stillbirth
- Kennel cough

Symptoms of Canine Herpes in Puppies

- Sudden death of newborn puppy
- Weakness, lethargy
- Persistent crying
- Lack of suckle reflex/appetite
- Painful abdomen, bruising or bloating of the abdomen
- Soft, yellow/green feces
- Chilled, cold puppies
- Respiratory difficulty, nasal discharge
- Hemorrhages, such as nose bleeds and small bruises

- Older puppies may develop nervous system abnormalities, including blindness and seizures

Canine Herpes Diagnosed

If a puppy is stillborn or dies soon after birth, a necropsy should be performed to determine the cause of death. There are many potential causes for puppy death, and you will want to evaluate whether the rest of the litter is at risk and what care is needed. Please call your veterinarian for instructions on how to arrange this.

Adult dogs are generally tested for CHV if they are intended for breeding or if their history suggests a problem with CHV. A veterinarian may check bloodwork to attempt to confirm recent exposure to the virus

Anytime newborn puppies are observed to be unwell or “fading,” it is crucial that you contact the vet. If CHV is confirmed, treatment can begin with antiviral medication and supportive care. It is also important to keep puppies warm, as the virus requires a low temperature to survive. Unfortunately, death often occurs rapidly in CHV-infected puppies despite good care.

Prevented

CHV is a common virus that many adult dogs come into contact with. The best way to combat this disease in young puppies is through preventing exposure. It is important to isolate a pregnant female from other dogs during the high-risk period--both late in her pregnancy and during the first three weeks after birth. A CHV vaccine exists, but is not yet licensed for use in the United States.