



Rebecca Slivka, DVM Northwood Animal Hospital

Dr. Rebecca "Reba" Slivka is the owner of Northwood Animal Hospital, located in High Point, North Carolina. She grew up in nearby Danville, Virginia. She studied Animal Science at Virginia Tech and remained there to earn her DVM degree from The Virginia Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine in May, 2009. Dr. Slivka enjoys all aspects of veterinary medicine, with specific interests in medicine, nutrition and behavior. Outside of work she enjoys riding her paint horse Scout, running and cheering for the Virginia Tech Hokies. She is planning on running her first marathon this November at the Richmond Marathon. At home, she enjoys spending time with her husband, Jonathan, who is also the office manager at Northwood Animal Hospital. The rest of her furry family includes three dogs, Hokie, Raina and Mr. Bojangles, and two mice, Maleficent and Chispita.

PARVO: A Deadly Disease Everyone Needs to Know About

Imagine if there was a local deadly disease outbreak. The disease causes severe vomiting and bloody diarrhea. Without aggressive treatment, requiring days of intensive care and hospitalization, the disease is almost always fatal, and the best treatment doesn't always guarantee survival. Believe it or not, this disease is very prevalent in the Triad, state, nation and world. Fortunately, this disease does not affect humans; unfortunately, it affects man's best friend, the dog. You may have even heard of this disease: the Canine Parvovirus, commonly known as "parvo." Although there are highly effective vaccines available to prevent this disease, many dogs in the area are still affected by this disease, most of which are puppies that, without treatment, often pass away at only a few months old.

Parvo first appeared in the US in 1978. The virus affects both domestic and wild canines (foxes, wolves). The virus is extremely hardy; it is preserved by freezing and is resistant to most household cleaners. An infected dog's stool contains 35 MILLION of these resilient viral particles per ounce. It is not hard to believe that this virus exists in essentially every environment, especially outdoors. Considering this, attempting to protect your puppy from parvo by simply avoiding exposure is nearly impossible.

Once infected with parvo, there is an incubation period of 3 to 7 days before the dog shows symptoms. The virus first enters the lymph nodes where it replicates to large numbers. The virus then travels through the blood to the bone marrow where it destroys cells of the immune system, the same cells which the dog requires to fight off the virus. The last place of attack is the GI tract. Here, the virus destroys the villi of the intestine. The villi are critical to absorbing nutrients; once destroyed, severe vomiting and diarrhea develop. In fact, the intestine becomes so damaged that bloody diarrhea occurs and toxic bacteria from the digestive system enter the bloodstream. Without prompt aggressive treatment, the dog usually passes away from severe dehydration or secondary to toxins from bacteria in the bloodstream.

If your dog shows any signs of parvo, such as lethargy, not eating, vomiting, or diarrhea, it should be taken to a veterinarian right away, especially if it is a puppy. The sooner the disease is diagnosed, the sooner treatment can be started, thus increasing chances of survival.

If the veterinarian suspects parvo, they can perform a parvo test to diagnose the disease. If the dog tests positive, it must be started on aggressive treatment immediately. The goal of treatment is to provide supportive care, thus allowing the dog to survive until it can fight off the virus. Since dogs with parvo become severely dehydrated, fluid therapy is a crucial aspect of treatment. The most effective way to give fluids is intravenously, and this requires hospitalization and constant monitoring for as many as 5 to 7 days. Treatment also includes antibiotic injections to eliminate the bacteria that enter the bloodstream and anti-nausea medications to prevent vomiting. This intensive treatment can cost hundreds up to thousands of dollars, and survival is still not guaranteed, as average survival rates are about 80% with intensive treatment. In order to treat a dog with parvo, a veterinary facility must have a specialized isolation unit to prevent spread of the virus throughout the hospital. If your primary veterinarian does not have an isolation unit at their hospital, they will likely have to refer you to a specialty or emergency clinic that has an isolation unit and offers 24 hour care. Many people cannot go that route due to the expense. In this case, fluids can be given under the skin and the dog can be cared for at home, but very few dogs survive with this conservative treatment. For a vet, the worst part of seeing a dog or puppy pass away from parvo is knowing that it could have been prevented with proper vaccination.

Vaccination is imperative to preventing parvo, especially for puppies. The timing of the vaccination is very important. When a puppy is born, it acquires antibodies from its mother's milk which protects the puppy from catching parvo. However, these antibodies can actually prevent a puppy's immune system from responding to the parvo vaccine. As the puppy grows, the antibodies gradually wear off and the puppy is then able to respond to the vaccine.



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There is a window of about a week in which the puppy does not have enough antibodies to be protected from parvo, but yet has enough antibodies to prevent response to the parvo vaccine. Therefore, puppies should have a parvo vaccine starting at 6 to 8 weeks of age, and will need a booster every 2 to 4 weeks until the puppy is at least 14 to 16 weeks of age. Since Parvovirus is essentially everywhere, puppies should avoid public places such as parks, pet shops, and kennels until at least 16 weeks of age. Adult dogs also require vaccination as recommended by your veterinarian. If you get a new puppy or dog, you need to take it to a veterinarian right away. The veterinarian can then develop a parvo vaccination schedule so your new family member can become fully protected from parvo and avoid needless heartbreak.

If you would like to schedule a consultation to talk more about parvo or the vaccination process, please contact my office at 336-887-2606 and reference this article. (*see our ad on page 10*)



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