

Common dog illnesses and diseases

There are several dog illnesses and diseases that puppies are vulnerable to, and keeping your pup safe and healthy is probably on the top of your 'to do' list.

There are several serious, contagious canine illnesses out there (some of which are usually fatal if left untreated), but the good news is that a full course of puppy shots will go a long way towards protecting your precious puppy.

And if, in spite of your best efforts, your little guy does get sick, when caught early enough and treated quickly, most canine health problems can be treated successfully.

To give your pup the best chance of a full recovery, you need to be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of dog illnesses and know what to do next.... and that's where the information and advice on this page can help.

Commonly seen contagious dog illnesses

Here are the causes, symptoms and treatment for some of the most common, contagious dog illnesses that your puppy is vulnerable to...

Distemper - Highly contagious viral disease. Can be transmitted through discharge from eyes or nose, through the air, or on shoes, hands etc. Affects the lungs, intestines and brain.

Symptoms include runny nose or eyes, coughing, vomiting and/or diarrhoea, lethargy, loss of appetite. Can advance to include partial paralysis or seizures.

Treatment is basically 'supportive care' such as encouragement to eat, fluid administration and veterinary care for seizures.

Hepatitis - Highly contagious viral disease which affects the liver. Starts in tonsils, spreads to lymph nodes, bloodstream and liver. Can be transmitted through urine, faeces and saliva.

Symptoms are similar to Distemper. Severe cases can progress rapidly and cause sudden death.

Treatment is supportive care which may include IV fluids and medications.

Leptospirosis - Bacterial disease affecting the urinary system, including liver and kidneys. Mainly transmitted through infected urine.

Symptoms include loss of appetite, vomiting, lethargy, fever. More advanced symptoms include jaundice, increased thirst and dehydration due to frequent urination.

Treatment- early antibiotic treatment can lessen the severity and/or duration of this illness.

Para influenza - A highly infectious viral infection of the respiratory system. Easy airborne transmission through coughing and sneezing.

Symptoms include a runny nose, cough and fever.

Treatment is mostly supportive, with antibiotics being given for secondary infections.

Parvovirus - Extremely contagious viral disease that attacks the intestines, lymph nodes and bone marrow. Rare variety can attack the heart resulting in sudden death. Easily transmitted through contact with infected faeces, either directly or on shoes, hands etc. Black and tan breeds such as Doberman Pinschers and [Rottweilers](#) tend to be especially vulnerable, as are Pitbulls.

Symptoms include extreme lethargy, loss of appetite, and severe vomiting and diarrhoea (often bloody) which results in dehydration.

Treatment is mainly supportive and relies heavily on intravenous fluids to counteract dehydration and intravenous antibiotics to attack sepsis infection.

Rabies - One of the most well-known dog illnesses. A severe and usually fatal viral disease that affects the brain and nervous system. Transmitted through saliva. Once symptoms appear this illness is always fatal to both dogs and humans.

Symptoms - are behavioural and usually include unusual, irrational and frenzied aggression (if your dog was very shy you may see a increased affection or acute shyness if previously friendly). You may also see lack of co-ordination, seizures and the classic foaming at the mouth.

Treatment There is no treatment for Rabies and the disease is always fatal.

Bordetella - Also known as **Kennel Cough**, this is a highly contagious bacterial infection which affects the respiratory system. Transmitted through saliva or nasal discharge.

Symptoms include runny nose and a lot of coughing and sneezing.

Treatment in mild cases can just be supportive, but in severe cases or when secondary infections are present (such as pneumonia) antibiotics are used.

Corona virus - Highly infectious viral disease that affects the intestines. Transmitted through feces.

Symptoms - include diarrhoea, lethargy, loss of appetite and dehydration.

Treatment is supportive and concentrates on treating the dehydration.

Lyme Disease - A bacterial infection that's transmitted by the bite of an infected deer tick. Can affect the heart, kidneys and joints.

Symptoms include swollen and/or painful joints, limping, lethargy. A 'bull's eye' type rash may appear at the site of the tick bite, but is unusual in canine Lyme disease.

Treatment is usually several weeks on antibiotics

Coccidiosis - One of the parasitic dog illnesses which affects the intestinal tract of puppies (most often seen in puppies between 2 and 12 weeks of age). Caused by the presence of the coccidian protozoa. Transmitted through faeces. Many adult dogs and puppies are carriers of this disease but don't show symptoms and eventually build up an immunity to it. If a young puppy is stressed, or unwell, the disease can 'flare up' as a result.

Symptoms - include diarrhoea, often pale grey to white in colour and very smelly! Vomiting, lethargy and loss of appetite are common. Symptoms can be mild to severe.

Treatment is supportive, with fluids being given to combat dehydration. Plus the use of a sulfa-based anti-biotic to treat the disease, usually a 5 - 7 day course.

Giardiasis - also sometimes known as 'Beaver Fever'. Caused by protozoa Parasites called Giardia, which are found in rivers, streams, lakes and other bodies of water that contain traces of animal faeces.

Symptoms - Many dogs with Giardia are 'a-symptomatic' which means that they don't show any symptoms, but continue to 'carry' and transmit the disease. However, the main symptom is diarrhoea, which is often watery and foul-smelling. Vomiting, weight loss and lethargy may also occur.

Treatment - antibiotics are required, and the most commonly used medications are Metronidazole (known as Flagyl) and Fenbendazole (Panacur). Both are effective, but your pup may need more than one round of treatment to eliminate the problem. Giardiasis can be transmitted to humans, so avoid swimming in water that could be infected, and follow excellent personal hygiene precautions of your dog gets this disease.

You'll probably notice that many of the serious dog illnesses listed in the above chart have very similar symptoms, the most common being lethargy, vomiting, diarrhoea and fever.

If your puppy shows any of the above signs it's always better to be safe than sorry, so take him to your veterinarian immediately.

It's possible it's just a minor tummy upset or something similar, but let your veterinarian be the one to make that call.

For those niggling puppy health worries, or situations that aren't urgent, an online veterinarian can give you the answers you need, without the cost of a vet visit or stressing out your dog.

Of course, it's not a substitute for hands-on care, and if your pup is really unwell, has injured himself or been involved in an accident etc., you need to get him to a real, live vet right away.

Prevention is better than cure

Having a sick puppy is worrying, and getting him the care he needs to get better may be very expensive, so it makes sense to try to prevent your little guy or girl from getting sick in the first place.

Almost all of the above dog illnesses can be prevented by simply making sure that your puppy gets the recommended course of puppy shots.... so why take any unnecessary chances?