

## **2016-17 Nowra Bomaderry Parvovirus Outbreak**

It's been a very busy summer for vets with the outbreak of Parvovirus in Nowra and Bomaderry. This is neither new or surprising. In previous newsletters, I likened Parvovirus to the Ebola virus for "nastiness" and "ability to spread".

I know how devastating Parvovirus is and "I don't want it on my watch!". That's why our vaccine reminder letters and newsletters have included warning articles about Parvovirus for the last 6 years. To ensure dogs get their vaccines, we post out current and 2, 4 and 6 month overdue letters. We also phone, post, Email and SMS owners with due reminders

This may appear to be overkill from us, but thankfully, most of our clients heed our advice. As a result, we have not seen Parvovirus in Berry or Shoalhaven Heads (so far).

But this could change overnight if recovering dogs (or dogs that are infected but not yet sick) visit the area and spread millions of the viruses in the parks and footpaths.

Parvovirus can last in soil or on concrete for 12 or more months. A dog sniffing in the park can pick up Parvovirus from where an infected dog went to the toilet 12 months ago.

Parvovirus mutated from Feline Parvovirus approx. 25 years ago, in just one country. It spread around the whole world in just 18 months. That's how clever it is at spreading; Parvovirus is highly contagious!

People traveling to Parvovirus "Hot Spots" risk bringing Parvovirus back home on their shoes or body if they have trodden on infected soil/pathways or handled other dogs.

### *What Does Parvovirus Do?*

Parvovirus destroys the lining of a dog's stomach and intestines. Affected dogs pass bloody vomit and diarrhoea. They are in great pain and severe shock. Death follows quickly.

### *Can Parvovirus be Treated?*

Affected dogs require several days of intensive care, pain relief, IV fluid therapy, blood transfusions, drugs and confinement to an isolation ward. Staff have to wear disposable protective clothing so they don't spread the virus any further.

Unfortunately, despite all these great efforts, many dogs die after 1-7 days and owners are left with huge vet bills and no dog.

Euthanasia is often the only option left to owners.

### *Are "Vaccine Days" a Good Idea?*

Although the idea is admirable, I believe it runs the risk of actually spreading the disease.

The dog in front of you in the queue may already be infected and not showing signs, but it's shedding the virus wherever it goes. You can't tell just by looking at a dog whether or not it already has Parvovirus.

The Parvovirus vaccine takes a few days to work; it does not prevent a recently infected dog from developing the disease.

Personally, if I owned an unvaccinated dog, I would be very worried about taking it from home to somewhere where there could have been a dog recently infected with Parvovirus.

I would also avoid any outdoor area in a suburb with a Parvovirus outbreak in case it has been contaminated by dogs shedding the virus.

Despite everyone's best efforts, it is very hard to de-contaminate infected outdoor and indoor areas on a regular basis e.g. car parks, waiting and consult rooms. I would be asking a vet clinic what precautions they are taking to prevent spread of Parvovirus from their place of business.

#### *What About a House Call Vet?*

House calls in an infected suburb would be another option provided the vet is wearing disposable protective clothing and/or is decontaminating themselves and their equipment when going from house to house.

Vets can't tell just by examining a dog if it hasn't just recently picked up Parvovirus and is shedding the virus in its saliva and droppings. It is very easy to carry the virus from house to house on their hands, body or clothing.

#### *My Recommendations*

- Keep unvaccinated dogs at home
- Make sure all dogs in the household, even those on farms, get their booster shots ASAP
- Remove clothing and shoes when returning home and thoroughly disinfect your hands if you have been handling other dogs
- Ask your vet if they have been treating any cases, and if so, what precautions they are taking to prevent themselves or their premises from being a Parvovirus carrier/hotspot