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New Protocol Gives Parvo Puppies a Fighting Chance When Owners Can't Afford Hospitalization.

Vacita

By, Carol Borchert

Canine parvovirus is a serious and often fatal viral illness that most commonly affects puppies, though unvaccinated adult dogs can be infected as well.
While treatment for parvovirus is available, it can be cost prohibitive for many families.

Now, a new protocol developed at the *Colorado State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital* may help save "parvo puppies" and give their families a chance to give their dogs a healthy life.

"Parvovirus is one of the most common and deadliest viruses that unvaccinated dogs tend to get," said *Dr. Lauren Sullivan*, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Clinical Sciences and a veterinarian with the Critical Care Unit at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital.
"While a vaccine is available, puppies can be exposed to the disease before their vaccinations are complete, or if they haven't received puppy wellness care due to their owner's financial limitations."

Parvovirus, which is spread through exposure to feces from infected dogs, has a wide range of symptoms including lethargy, vomiting, fever, and diarrhea.
It primarily impacts the gastrointestinal tract and the circulatory system, where it suppresses the bone marrow and causes the white blood cell count to drop.
Veterinary care focuses on supporting the puppy with IV fluids and antibiotics, and close monitoring, while the puppy weathers the viral storm.
Without intensive veterinary intervention, parvovirus is almost always fatal due to dehydration and/or a severely compromised immune system.

Intervention, while effective, requires inpatient care looking at R7000.00 + – a cost some owners simply can't afford.
Euthanasia often becomes the only other option for severely affected dogs and suggested by the vet.

Rex
CSU researchers are showing that there is another possibility – intensive at-home care at a fraction of the cost R 2000.00 +, but with similar outcomes when compared to the inpatient "gold standard" of care.

The treatment relies on two drugs recently released by Pfizer Animal Health (which funded the CSU parvovirus study):

Maropitant, a strong anti-nausea medication given under the skin once a day; &
Convenia, an antibiotic given under the skin once, and lasting two weeks;
Fluid administration under the skin three times daily.

"Rather than being hospitalized, our research shows that puppies can be successfully treated with a protocol that can be replicated at home," said *Dr. Sullivan*.
"We still recommend inpatient care as the best practice, but in some cases that simply isn't financially possible."

The study, which began June 4, was conducted by *Drs. Sullivan, David Twedt, Pedro Boscan, Emilee Venn (a resident in critical care); Karolina Preisner (student coordinator), and veterinary students interested in the research experience*.
The study was advertised to veterinarians in the greater Colorado community, who referred cases from their practices.
A total of 40 dogs were admitted to the study group, randomized to one group that received traditional gold standard care and one group that received the at-home protocol.

Lily
"What we showed was that it is possible to treat dogs with parvovirus *on an outpatient basis," said Dr. Sullivan*.
"If owners have the willingness to provide care at home, it's a reasonable alternative.
It's not ideal and we still recommend inpatient care, but having this protocol as an option could help save the lives of thousands of dogs across the United States every year."

While results of the study are still being compiled, *Dr. Sullivan* said that early numbers show an **85 %** survival rate for the outpatient group, compared to a 90 % survival rate for the inpatient group.
One patient was moved from the outpatient group to the inpatient group when its medical condition deteriorated.

"A really wonderful part of the study was the outpouring of gratitude from dog owners who were told their dogs weren't going to make it," said *Dr. Sullivan*.
"Seeing them take their puppy's home was very gratifying.
The feedback we have had from general practitioners also has been rewarding; they are very excited to see something like this published. This is real life for them, having to deal with these difficult cases and not having great options.

"Of course, the most important thing we can do as veterinarians is work hard to educate people about parvovirus.
It can be prevented, and that's the best option of all."

Preventing Parvovirus.
Vaccination is the most sure-fire way to prevent puppies from being infected with parvovirus.
Puppies have immunity from their mothers early in life, but should receive their first vaccine between 6 and 8 weeks of age (after weaning), and then two boosters at three-week intervals.

Puppies are not fully protected against parvovirus until they have completed the multiple rounds (normally 3 vaccinations – on 6 – 8 – 12 weeks of vaccinations).

While owners often are excited to show off their new puppy, the risk of taking a puppy out in public outweighs any benefit.

Owners should avoid taking puppies to pet stores, doggie day care, kennels, dog parks, or other places that dogs frequent **until the puppy has its complete set of parvovirus vaccinations.**

For veterinarians who wish to consult with *Drs. Sullivan or Venn* on the parvovirus protocol, visit the Veterinary Teaching Hospital Critical Care Unit.
Dr. Sullivan expects the results of the parvovirus study to be first presented at the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences Research Day early next year, prior to being submitted for publication in professional journals.