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**What Is Parvo and How Do I Protect My Puppy or Dog from It?**

Canine parvovirus (often called parvo) is a highly contagious and potentially deadly virus that affects dogs, especially puppies. Puppies are particularly vulnerable. Fortunately, with the right precautions, you can protect your furry friend from this dangerous disease. Let’s talk about what parvo is, how it spreads, and how to keep your dog safe.

**What Is Canine Parvovirus?**

Parvovirus is a viral disease that primarily affects a dog’s gastrointestinal system, but it can also attack the heart in young puppies. It spreads easily through direct contact with an infected dog or contaminated objects, such as food bowls, collars, or even human hands. Parvo is particularly dangerous because it can survive in the environment, like in soil or on surfaces, for months or even years. It is not contagious to people.

**How Does Parvo Spread?**

The virus is shed in the feces of infected dogs, and even a tiny amount of contaminated material can spread the disease. Parvo is tough and can survive harsh weather conditions, making it especially dangerous in areas where infected dogs have been. This is why vaccination and good hygiene are critical.

**Symptoms of Parvovirus**

If your dog has parvo, they may show symptoms such as:

* Severe vomiting
* Diarrhea (often bloody)
* Lethargy
* Loss of appetite
* Fever

If you notice any of these symptoms, contact your veterinarian immediately. Parvo can progress rapidly and is often fatal if not treated promptly.

**Protecting Your Dog from Parvo**

**Vaccination: Your Best Defense**

Vaccination is the most effective way to protect your dog from parvo. Puppies should begin their vaccine series at 6–8 weeks of age and receive boosters every 3–4 weeks until they are about 16 weeks old. Adult dogs also need regular boosters to stay protected.

**Keeping Puppies Safe**

Until your puppy has completed their full series of vaccinations, they are especially vulnerable to parvo. Here’s how you can protect them:

* **Avoid public places:** Do not take your puppy to parks, dog-friendly stores, or other high-traffic areas where unvaccinated dogs may have been.
* **Limit contact:** Only allow your puppy to interact with fully vaccinated dogs.
* **Cleanliness matters:** Clean your puppy’s living area regularly and disinfect surfaces with a solution of bleach and water.

**What to Do If Parvo Has Been on Your Property**

If a dog on your property has been diagnosed with parvo, it’s important to take precautions before bringing any new dogs home:

* **Clean thoroughly:** Disinfect all surfaces and objects the infected dog had contact with. Use a bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts water) to kill the virus. This includes fabric, bedding and floors.
* **Wait before bringing in a new dog:** Parvo can live in soil for months. If possible, wait at least a year before introducing another dog to the property. When you do, ensure they are fully vaccinated.

**What to Do If Your Dog Has Parvo**

If you suspect your dog has parvo:

* **Call your vet immediately:** Parvo is an emergency and requires professional treatment.
* **Isolate your dog:** Keep them away from other pets to prevent spreading the virus.

The earlier parvo is caught and treated, the better the chances of survival. While treatment can be expensive, many shelters and nonprofit organizations offer financial assistance or low-cost care options.

**Many Areas Have Low-Cost Options for Prevention and Care**

If you’re having trouble accessing vaccines or veterinary care, don’t hesitate to reach out to your local animal shelter. Many organizations offer affordable or free resources to help keep your pet healthy and safe.

**Final Thoughts**

Canine parvovirus is a serious threat, but with the right steps, you can protect your dog or puppy. Vaccinate them on schedule, practice good hygiene, and take extra precautions with puppies or in areas where parvo has been present. By staying informed and proactive, you’re giving your dog the best chance at a long, healthy life.