

## CANINE DISTEMPER VIRUS (CDV)

Distemper is a highly contagious viral disease of domestic dogs and other animals such as ferrets, skunks, and raccoons. It is an incurable, often fatal, multisystemic (affecting multiple organs) disease that affects the respiratory, gastrointestinal, and central nervous systems. Distemper is caused by the canine distemper virus (CDV).

### How is it spread?

CDV can be spread through direct contact (licking, breathing air, etc.) or indirect contact (bedding, toys, food bowls, etc.), though it cannot live on surfaces for very long. Inhaling the virus is the primary method of exposure. There is no known cure for CDV, and quick response to the disease greatly improves your pet's chances at survival, especially for younger puppies.

### Signs & Symptoms

Initially, infected dogs will develop watery to pus-like discharge from their eyes. They then develop fever, nasal discharge, gastrointestinal signs (lack of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea), coughing and lethargy. As the virus attacks the nervous system, infected dogs develop circling behavior, head tilt, muscle twitches, convulsions with jaw chewing movements and salivation ("chewing gum fits"), seizures, and partial or complete paralysis. The virus may also cause the footpads to thicken and harden, leading to its nickname "hard pad disease." Distemper is often fatal, and dogs that survive usually have permanent, irreparable nervous system damage.

### Diagnosis & Treatment

Veterinarians diagnose canine distemper through clinical appearance and laboratory testing. There is no cure for canine distemper infection. Treatment typically consists of supportive care and efforts to prevent secondary infections; control vomiting, diarrhea and neurologic symptoms. Dehydration is usually combatted through administration of IV fluids. Dogs infected with canine distemper must be separated from other dogs to minimize the risk of further infection.

### Prevention

Fortunately there are highly effective vaccines to prevent this deadly disease. A series of vaccinations and boosters are administered to puppies to increase the likelihood of building immunity when the immune system has not yet fully matured. Avoid gaps in the immunization schedule of older dogs, and make sure distemper vaccinations are up to date. Avoid contact with infected animals and wildlife. Use caution when socializing puppies or unvaccinated dogs at parks, puppy classes, obedience classes, doggy day care and other places where dogs can congregate.