

ACUTE HEMORRHAGIC DIARRHEA SYNDROME (AHDS)

Acute hemorrhagic diarrhea syndrome (AHDS) is an acute disorder of dogs characterized by bloody diarrhea. Most cases occur without warning in otherwise healthy dogs. The main and most disturbing symptom is large amounts of bloody diarrhea, very often bright red. Some dogs may also experience vomiting, have a painful abdomen, decreased appetite, lethargy, or fever. It is a condition which can affect virtually any age, gender or breed of dog, with small and toy breeds who are middle-aged being most often afflicted. The onset can be very rapid and can be associated with severe fluid loss, which can lead to shock even before classic signs of dehydration are seen. It is a condition which can be fatal if not treated in an appropriate and timely manner.

Acute hemorrhagic diarrhea syndrome (AHDS) in dogs is an emergency situation. Emergency veterinary medical care should be sought immediately.

Though no specific cause for acute hemorrhagic diarrhea syndrome in dogs has been found, research into its causes does continue on an ongoing basis. Here are some of the potential causes or contributing factors which have been found:

- Clostridium perfringens, a species of bacteria which produce a toxin that can cause blood poisoning
- Toxins which can disturb the lining of intestines and intestinal blood vessels
- Stress and hyperactivity
- Dietary indiscretions (ingestion of nonfood items or foods outside the normal dietary regimen of the dog)
- Intestinal foreign body
- Immune related diseases
- Pancreatitis
- Allergic reactions (includes those inhaled as well as those ingested)
- Intestinal parasites
- Increased risk for pets with owners in the medical field

Diagnosis of acute hemorrhagic diarrhea syndrome in dogs can be challenging for veterinary professionals. This is one of the many diseases or conditions in which your input can be important for obtaining the appropriate diagnosis quickly. Your input will need to address the potential dietary regimen issue, activity levels of your pet, and any known allergies or previous allergic reactions. Because the bloody diarrhea can be a symptom of a variety of conditions, your veterinarian will need to eliminate as many of those other diseases and conditions as quickly as possible. He/she will do a physical examination and will order blood testing which will likely include:

- A complete blood count (CBC) to assess blood component values
- Serum biochemical profile (CHEM) to assess liver function, kidney function and electrolytes
- Urinalysis (UA) to assess kidney function and look for markers for inflammation and infection
- Blood coagulation profile (PT/PTT) to ascertain if the canine's blood is clotting appropriately

Ultimately, the diagnosis of AHDS are based on these criteria:

- Age of the afflicted canine
- Breed of the afflicted canine - generally small or toy breed
- Percentage of red blood cells - usually elevated
- Blood protein level - usually decreased



Treatment options for AHDS will be dependent upon the level of severity with which the canine is afflicted. Your vet will be primarily concerned with the immediate condition of your pet upon presentation in the clinic. It is likely that your pet will be in some stage of dehydration and will require some emergency measures to stabilize him/her.

Fluids and most likely electrolytes will likely be administered intravenously. It is imperative that your pet's organs receive appropriate oxygenation and that can only happen if the fluid

levels in the body are sufficient to allow those precious red blood cells to move through the vascular system to nourish all of the vital organs. This is of utmost vital concern and will be addressed first.

Here are some other options which may be included in your pet's treatment plan:

- Analgesics - These medications will help ease the pain that your pet is enduring, making them more comfortable and able to relax
- Antibiotics - The intestinal lining will need to be treated for bacterial infiltration into the bloodstream to prevent sepsis
- Nutritional - This option will include dietary regimens which will restrict some of the types of foods consumed while your pet recuperates
- Anti-diarrheal/Anti-nausea medications - Most canines who are afflicted with AHDS are also vomiting right along with the diarrhea; medications to ease the nausea will enable the canine to consume wholesome, healthy foods to regain strength

As dramatic as the diarrhea is, most patients have an equally dramatic improvement in the first 24 hours of hospitalization and the average dog is out of the hospital after three days total.

This syndrome is considered to be relatively common in canines and it is treatable with success and good prognosis. The key is to be aware of the fact that, just as in humans, diarrhea and vomiting can dehydrate the body pretty quickly. The canine body is generally smaller than most adult humans and dehydration will occur more rapidly than you might think. Getting your canine to an emergency veterinary facility as quickly as possible when an acute hemorrhagic diarrhea syndrome episode strikes could mean the difference between the eventual return of your pet to your home or not.