

## **THE PARVOVIRUS STORY**

This is a **Healthy Happy Dogs** message from Roper Gulf Regional Council Vet Service.

*Introduction of interviewer and interviewee who will be having a conversation about parvovirus.*

Parvovirus is a sickness that dogs and puppies get all around Australia. You have probably seen it in your community. Today we are going to talk about what we know about it and how to stop our dogs from getting sick.

### **What is parvovirus?**

Well, viruses are a tiny germ. They are so small we can't see them. And Parvo virus is a type of virus that gets into dogs and makes them sick.

Parvovirus lies asleep in it's shell in the ground. It can live in the ground like this for years and years. When the virus gets swallowed by a young dog, usually on a tiny speck of dirt, it hatches out in the dogs gut.

Parvo virus makes puppies sicker than big dogs get because their little bodies can't fight the virus. It is a horrible way to die.

### **Can you tell me about what happens to these dogs with parvo virus?**

Once the virus gets inside a pup the virus breeds up in the lining of the gut. After about a week of the virus breeding in the gut, the inside of the puppies gut dies and peels off. As the gut peels off it bleeds very badly.

What we see on the outside is a puppy that looks very sad. When the gut bleeds it is very painful. The puppy will stop eating. The pup might vomit a lot or have very smelly bloody guna.

Pups usually die from dehydration and a bleeding gut after 2 or 3 days.

All the vomit and guna from the pup is full of parvovirus. These means the virus spreads through all the pups in a family or community quickly. A few pups might survive but most of them will die.

### **How do dogs and puppies catch the virus?**

Dogs and puppies catch the virus when it gets into their guts. They might sniff it up on a tiny bit of dirt, or lick it off their hair. Remember we can't see the virus but it is asleep in the house or yard or park from when another pup was sick a long time before.

The virus can also stick onto other things and move from house to house around the community. It can stick on our hands but also on things like our shoes, our swags, our car tyres or on the hair of other dogs.

So if we walk on dirt that has the virus, or touch the diarrhoea, or touch a puppy that is sick with the virus, we can spread the virus to the next place that we walk to or the next thing that we touch.

Bringing new pups into the community can also bring parvovirus into the community. A pup might look fine when we pick it up in town but it might already have the parvovirus breeding up inside its guts. It can take up to 10 days for a pup to get sick after the virus first gets into it's guts.

### **Cleaning up Parvovirus vomit and gona.**

The vomit and diarrhoea from a puppy with parvovirus has a lot of the virus in it.

If the gona and vomit are in the yard we can't kill the virus once it is in the dirt because dirt stops disinfectants working.

But the virus can be killed if it is inside the house. It is a very strong virus so it takes strong disinfectants to kill it. A strong mix of bleach and water (1 part bleach and 30 parts water) left to sit for 15 mins will kill the virus. You need to clean all the spots that the sick pup has touched, and all the spots that the virus might have stuck to. For example if you picked up a sick puppy and then opened the door, the door handle needs to be cleaned.

### **So how do we stop our dogs getting parvo?**

Vaccination is the way of saving your pup from parvo virus.

New born puppies get protection from parvo from their mother's milk. The mother's milk has things called antibodies in it. These antibodies are a bit like the old pac-man game, they gobble up any parvo virus that gets into the pups gut.

But over time the antibodies from the mother's milk run out. They run out when the pup is between 6 weeks and 4 months old. Also if a pup is raised on a titty bottle it will not have any antibodies from its mother's milk and can catch parvo virus very young.

When the mother's antibodies have run out the virus can then breed up in the pups gut. This is the most dangerous time for the pups if they have not been vaccinated.

We can stop our pups catching parvo virus by giving them a vaccination. The vet can give the pup this needle. Some Council offices might also have the vaccination for new pups. The vaccination works by making the pup make its own antibodies to fight the virus.

But if a puppy is already sick from parvo virus the vaccination will not help it get better. It town the vets put sick pups on a drip in hospital. The treatment costs between \$1000 and \$3000. So prevention is better than cure.

Puppies need the vaccination at about 6 and 10 weeks old. Adult dogs only need one vaccination.

If you get a new puppy, it is best if it has had a vaccination already. The person selling you the pup should be able to show you the vet certificate to prove it has been vaccinated. If it has not had a vaccination, get one from the vet before you take the pup home.

The vaccination takes 10 days to work. So you need to keep your puppy away from places where the virus might be for 10 days after the shot. This gives them time to make their own antibodies after the vaccination.

### **What else do we need to think about with parvovirus?**

Once dogs are vaccinated they will grow up to be strong, healthy and happy.

But there is a little warning that we need to keep in mind. When a girl dog has pups most families are used to only 1 or 2 pups living because the rest die from parvo virus.

But if we give all the pups a vaccination they will all grow up to be adults. So once puppies stop dying from parvovirus, dog numbers can build up very quickly in a community.

If a community wants to stop parvovirus it is very important they think about how many dogs they want to keep in the community and do desexing operations to stop the dogs breeding up.