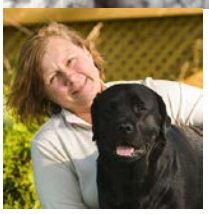
Everything You Need To Know About The Parvovirus Vaccine



By: Dana Scott -

Taking your dog for a walk around the block could cause him to contract a fatal and contagious disease…

We hear these warnings for parvovirus every year.

The media portrays parvo as a maniacal stalker waiting for the opportunity to claim your dog as a victim. Veterinarians warn us about what could happen if we don't get our puppies vaccinated.

With this type of media coverage and advice, it's hard not to fear parvo.

And it’s true – parvo is a very serious illness!

But if you look at the facts surrounding it, you’ll be less susceptible to the hype. You’ll be able to make better vaccination decisions based on science instead of fear.

So today, I am going to tell you everything you need to know about parvo. That way you can feel confident when your vet mentions the parvovirus vaccine at your puppy’s first visit.

But first, let’s dive deeper into what parvovirus is and how it can affect your dog.

What is Parvovirus?

Parvovirus (CPV or parvo) is a contagious viral infection. **It spreads through direct or indirect contact with infected feces**.

Dog parks, kennels, and your vet’s office are hotspots for transmitting this illness. Loved ones can even bring the disease into your home on the bottom of their shoes.

It’s a disease that **attacks the lining of your dog’s digestive tract**. But it can also attack young immune cells.

And…**puppies are the most susceptible**.

Symptoms of parvovirus? The hallmark **symptom of parvo is blood-stained feces with a yellowish tinge and a very distinct, unpleasant smell**. But other symptoms can include lethargy, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, fever and vomiting.

How Is Parvovirus Diagnosed?

parvovirus is easy for veterinarians to diagnose using a SNAP test. A test that accurately detects the parvovirus antigen in stool in about 10 minutes.

Your vet will also run blood work while you wait. This is to check your puppy's immune cells and hydration. If your puppy is infected, this will show how severely the virus is attacking his cells.

One reason vets advocate for the parvovirus vaccine is that **the cost of treating the illness can be high**. Vet bills totalling in the thousands are not unusual.

Most puppy owners are willing to pay these large bills to save their puppies … but not everyone can afford it.

At first glance, it makes sense. Vaccinate your puppy to avoid costly vet bills or loss of life in the future. But we're about to tell you what they don't say (and trust us, it's important).

Should I Give My Puppy the Parvovirus Vaccine?

There are five criteria that you should consider when making ANY vaccine decision.

Preview(opens in a new tab)

1. The mortality rate of the disease
2. Whether there is a known cure
3. The safety of the vaccine
4. The effectiveness of the vaccine
5. Whether the benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks

To help remove any confusion, let's look at how each of these factors apply to the parvovirus vaccine.

Mortality Rate

Despite the media scares and warnings from vets, **parvo has a survival rate of about 85%**.

This doesn't mean 15% of puppies die from parvo – it means that 15% of puppies who are exposed to it – and actually catch it – will die.

But the survival rate is greatly influenced by the treatment options.

Parvo Treatment

If your puppy does catch parvo, there are many things you can do to increase your puppy's chances of survival.

The first is detecting the virus and starting treatment as fast as possible. To do this, you want to be sure you understand the signs and keep an eye on your puppy's bowel movements.

While traditional methods of treatment (such as Tamiflu) can be effective, there are **alternative methods that can increase your puppy's chances of survival.**

- Natural products like Paxxin and Vibactra Plus
- Nosodes
- Herbs
- Other homeopathic treatments

…these are all very effective for managing parvo symptoms.

Vaccine Effectiveness

Vets and pet owners used to believe that 'more is better' when it came to vaccines. But there are very **real dangers associated with vaccination and over-vaccination.**

Not to mention, vaccination doesn't always result in the outcome we are looking for.

In fact, data from the Virbac Disease Watchdog shows that **28% of vaccinated puppies and 11% of vaccinated adults still get parvo.**

Now, you may be asking…

"How is that possible? Isn't that why I'm supposed to give my dog the parvovirus vaccine?"

There are many reasons vaccines fail, the most common reason being maternal antibodies.

Maternal Antibodies

Your puppy's immune system is not fully mature or active until around 6 months of age. But this doesn't mean your puppy isn't protected from disease early on.

Their mother's first milk, called colostrum, contains maternal antibodies. And, these antibodies provide passive immunity to help fight against disease.

When a puppy with a reasonable level of maternal antibodies is vaccinated, the vaccine is inactivated. The way the real virus would be.

To help combat this natural protection, conventional vaccine schedules recommend that puppies are vaccinated every 2 to 4 weeks until 16 weeks of age.

Problem solved…right?

Not really…

More and more pet owners are becoming aware of the dangers of vaccination and over-vaccination.

While maternal antibodies can help protect your puppy from disease, they can't protect against the additives in the vaccine…

- Mercury
- Formaldehyde
- Aluminum

…and that's just to name a few.

We will talk about how these additives offset the benefits vaccinations provide, but for now, remember…

If you choose to vaccinate – it only takes ONE shot.

And this fact has been common knowledge for over thirty years.

Zoetis Testing for Parvovirus Vaccine Efficacy

You may have heard of Zoetis – they're one of the largest producers of medicine and vaccination for pets and livestock.

What you may not know is that they tested the response to parvovirus in their combination vaccine.

To do this, they vaccinated 3 groups of puppies at different ages:
– 6 weeks
– 9 weeks
– 12 weeks

They then assessed the puppies' immune response by measuring their titers to parvovirus.
– At 6 weeks, only 52% of the puppies had developed an immune response.
– At 9 weeks, 88% of the puppies responded.
– At 12 weeks, 100% of the puppies responded.

What does this mean?

Vaccinating puppies at 6 to 8 weeks is a high-risk, low-value practice. At that age, the maternal antibodies will likely block the parvovirus vaccine.

Exposure

As well as vaccinating at the wrong time, exposure to the virus can play a role in vaccine failure.

If your puppy comes into contact with the virus, he will develop an immune response. These antibodies can block the vaccine … much like maternal antibodies.

Vaccinated or not … **don't expose your puppy to areas where he might catch parvo**. These areas include:

- Dog parks
- Pet stores
- Dog Hotels and Kennels
- Veterinary Clinic (the most likely place to be exposed to parvo)

Instead, keep your puppy close to home. Socialize him around the neighborhood. Wait to visit parvo hotspots until he is old enough for the vaccine to work.

Immunosuppression

Vaccines can also fail when your puppy is sick or stressed. When his immune system is compromised, he can't build an immune response.

And, at 6 to 8 weeks it makes little sense to vaccinate a puppy when you consider the stress he is going through…

- Leaving his dam and littermates
- Moving to a new home
- Starting a new routine
- Eating different foods

…In fact, vaccine failure is even more likely at this age.

Vaccine failure can also happen in puppies with suppressed immune systems.

- Medications like steroids or antibiotics
- Deworming
- Poor nutrition

…all of these put stress on your puppy's ability to protect and heal himself.

Another big stressor is vaccines!

Ones like the Canine Adenovirus-2 (CAV-2) vaccine, which protects against canine infectious hepatitis. It has been shown to cause immunosuppression in puppies for 10 days following vaccination.

That means, even if the vaccine does work, it will not protect your puppy immediately. He is very likely to become ill if he is exposed to even small amounts of disease.

Modified Live Vaccines (MLVs), like the parvovirus vaccine, also increase the risk of vaccine failure in immunocompromised dogs.

This is because MLVs are intended to mimic the disease by subjecting your puppy to a less dangerous version of it.

A healthy, stress free puppy may be able to fight it. But for an immunocompromised puppy it's much more difficult.

Improper Nutrition

When determining the effectiveness of a vaccine, you also want to look at your puppy's nutrition.

When your dog is stressed – which is very likely in the first few weeks he is with you – his body will be using up important resources to feed his stress hormones…

- Vitamin C
- Vitamin B5
- Zinc

If your puppy is low on these important nutrients before the vaccine is administered, **his immune system may not respond the way it should**. And this is critical to building up the antibodies that will protect him for life.

Safety of the Parvo Vaccine

It's difficult to determine the rate of adverse reactions for any vaccine.

Why?

Because they're rarely reported back to vets and manufacturers.

The cases you DO hear about are the obvious ones. Reactions that happen in the first 24 hours.

But few recognize the chronic diseases that vaccines produce – the ones that can take days, weeks, months or even years to develop after vaccination.

We miss the connection because we aren't looking for one.

But that doesn't mean they don't exist.

So…let's review in more detail some of the safety concerns with the parvovirus vaccine.

Autoimmune Disease

We mentioned earlier that maternal antibodies can't protect against the chemicals in vaccines…

- Mercury
- Aluminum
- Formaldehyde

Not to mention the foreign proteins and possible retroviruses.

These additives enhance vaccine effectiveness by ensuring the body responds to the small amount of virus contained in the vaccine.

They do this by stimulating an exaggerated immune response.

The problem is…**this heightened reaction can also cause autoimmune disorders**. Something that is affecting more and more dogs every year.

The Purdue studies, although inconclusive, revealed some unique insights about vaccinations leading to chronic disease.

They found vaccinated dogs developed autoantibodies to many of their own biochemicals, including:

- **Fibronectin**: Involved in tissue repair, cell multiplication, and growth. It also plays a role in differentiation between tissues and organs
- **Laminin**: Involved in many cellular activities. These include the intelligence, proliferation, and movement of cells.
- **Cardiolipin**: Often found in patients with Lupus Erythematosus and other autoimmune diseases. Cardiolipin is also associated with fetal loss and neurological conditions
- **Collagen**: Provides structure to bones and soft tissue. Likely the reason why many dogs developed mobility problems shortly after vaccination.
- **DNA**: Yes! The vaccinated dogs developed autoantibodies to their own DNA.

This should have sounded some pretty serious alarms!

Dr. Larry Glickman, who spearheaded the Purdue studies, says…

"Our ongoing studies of dogs show that following routine vaccination, there is a significant rise in the level of antibodies dogs produce against their own tissues. Some of these antibodies have been shown to target the thyroid gland, connective tissue… red blood cells, DNA, etc."

But instead, the study concluded that more research was required before taking action. It was decided that long-term follow-up wasn't necessary.

Cancer

Around the same time, the American Veterinary Medical Association initiated studies on **the link between cancer and vaccines in cats.**

The Vaccine-Associated Feline Sarcoma Task Force wanted to find out why 160,000 cats a year were getting terminal cancer at their vaccine sites.

These studies acknowledged that vaccine-induced cancer exists. But the Task Force decided the best plan was to continue vaccinating. The focus shifted towards finding out which cats were most likely to be affected.

They also suggested vaccinating cats in their tails. It would be easier to remove them if cancer were to develop as a result of the vaccines…

And dogs are not immune to this risk.

The Journal of Veterinary Medicine showed that **dogs also develop vaccine-induced cancers at their injection sites**.

Heart Disease

Earlier we quoted Larry Glickman, who spearheaded the Purdue studies.

In the same comment he went on to say…

"I do believe that the heart conditions in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels could be the end result of repeated immunizations by vaccines containing tissue culture contaminants that cause a progressive immune response directed at connective tissue in the heart valves."

The heart disease Glickman is talking about is cardiomyopathy. Cardiomyopathy in dogs used to be very rare.

But, **since the parvo pandemic of 1978, cardiomyopathy has become more prevalent**.

Vaccination is likely the cause of most cases of cardiomyopathy. Prior cases of the condition were not associated with parvo.

Spreading the Virus

A final safety concern is that vaccinated dogs are virally active. This means **for 21 days after receiving the parvovirus vaccine, they shed the virus** every time they …

- Go out in the yard
- Take a walk
- Go the dog park
- Visit the vet's office
- Join a training class

Benefits vs. Risks of Parvo Vaccination

You've looked at many important facts when it comes to the parvo virus and vaccination:

- Parvo is a serious illness and, according to vets, can be costly to treat
- The mortality rate of puppies who catch parvo is 15%
- There are **treatment options that are more effective in unvaccinated puppies**
- If you decide to vaccinate your puppy, you must consider timing, exposure risk, levels of stress, their immune system and whether they are receiving the right nutrients to limit vaccine failure
- Vaccination can lead to autoimmune disease, cancer, heart disease and your puppy contracting the disease you are fighting against – parvovirus

At the end of the day, there's a lot to consider.

But do the benefits outweigh the risks? **Should you vaccinate your puppy for parvo?**

To Vaccinate or Not to Vaccinate?

When deciding whether you should vaccinate – **the decision is yours.**

What is crucial is that the decision is based on science.

NOT on the false belief that a simple vaccine will solve all your problems when it comes to your puppy's health and longevity.

There is no way to completely eliminate risk for your puppy – you can only choose which risk you can live with.

You need to make your own vaccine decision because, in the end, you are the one who has to deal with the consequences.

If you give your puppy the parvovirus vaccine, you are reducing the risk that he may be taken from you suddenly and violently.

But he may also end up suffering from chronic illnesses that will affect his quality of living and, in some cases, may even shorten his life.

- Hypothyroidism
- Allergies
- Cancer
- Cushing's Disease
- Addison's Disease
- Bowel Disease
- Joint Disease
- Heart Disease

Parvo is tragic when it hits but **these diseases can be just as devastating**…

Preventing Parvo

There are two approaches you can take when it comes to preventing parvovirus in your dog. The first of which is a more natural and holistic approach. The second being the parvovirus vaccine.

If you do decide to vaccinate, we will discuss ways for you to increase your puppy's success.

But before we get to that, let's discuss some alternatives…

Holistic Approach to Preventing Parvo

If you decide not to vaccinate your puppy for parvo, there are ways that you can reduce his risk of exposure or illness.

Holistic Vet

Before you even get your puppy, **find a true holistic practitioner**.

They will be able to provide you with the advice you need to protect your puppy. And, if he does get sick, you'll have someone to help you take care of him the right way.

Stick to your convictions – Find a vet who'll treat your puppy without damaging his immune system.

Many vets who call themselves holistic are quick to dispense antibiotics and Tamiflu. If you can't find a true holistic vet locally, there are many good ones who'll do phone consults. You can find directories at The Academy of Veterinary Homeopathy and the American Holistic Verterinary Medical Association.

If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Be an active partner in your puppy's health care.

At home you can give your puppy 24/7 care in his own bed. He'll be happier with his family. And he'll avoid the extra stress of being in a strange place.

Nosodes

Nosodes are an effective way to protect your puppy from parvo, and even treat the disease.

Tissues or fluid from a sick animal are diluted to create a safe remedy that acts as a blueprint for fighting the disease.

The main difference between a nosode and a vaccine is that there are **no chemicals or additives.**

This means your puppy can **safely build up antibodies without risking his long-term health.**

Proper Nutrition

Proper nutrition plays a huge role in your puppy's ability to protect and heal himself.

To ensure that your puppy is able to do this, you want to **feed him a diet that is rich in the vitamins, minerals and other nutrition he needs to stay strong.**

Feeding a completely raw diet is the best way to ensure your dog (at any age) is getting what he needs.

Related: If you are feeding your dog kibble, find tips on how to make it more nutritious here.

Avoid Stress

A stressed immune system can make it more difficult for your puppy to fight potential illnesses and disease.

That is why you need to create an environment that promotes healthy immune support.

Part of this is ensuring your puppy has the right food and immunity boosters. But you also want to minimize other stressors, like changing up his routine too often.

You also want to **avoid immunosuppressive drugs and toxins**.

Keep Them Clean and Healthy

Make sure your puppy does not have a parasite overload. **Parvo is much more difficult to treat in puppies with worms, giardia or coccidia.**

This does not mean you should worm your puppy routinely. This type of toxin can stress his immune system.

Instead, keep your puppy clean. Run fecal exams. If he shows signs of parasites, then you can make the decision to treat him with herbs, diatomaceous earth, or more potent drugs.

But remember…even herbal wormers can stress your dog's liver and immune system of dogs. So it's best to use only when there is a problem.

Vaccination for Parvovirus

If you do decide to vaccinate, do it in a way that gives your puppy the best chance of success…

Choose the Right Time

Current vaccination programs begin at 6 to 8 weeks of age, with a vaccination every 2 to 4 weeks until 16 weeks of age.

These are based on the belief that vaccines aren't that harmful. That puppy owners would rather pay for the repeated vaccines to keep their puppy safe.

But, looking back at the Vanguard study we talked about earlier on…

At 9 weeks, 88% of the puppies showed a response to the parvovirus vaccine

At 12 weeks, 100% of the puppies were protected

In both groups, the puppies only had one shot. That means, at 12 weeks, all the puppies were protected AND they minimized the number of additives introduced to their system.

Don't Get a Booster Shot

Regardless of what your vet may claim or what you read on Google, **your puppy does not need a booster once he acquires protection**. Immunity is all-or-nothing when it comes to most viruses.

Like the Chicken Pox or Measles, you are either immune or you are not.

Some have developed their immunity through exposure and some developed immunity through vaccination.

Regardless…once your system has built up immunities to the actual virus or the vaccine, you are protected for life and so is your puppy.

Use a Titer Test

Parvo is one scenario where **titers offer good predictive value**.

If you have vaccinated your puppy as close to 12 weeks as you are comfortable and still want to confirm that one shot was enough, opt for a titer test!

Titer tests determine whether your puppy has developed antibodies or not.

If there is ANY amount of antibody in their blood test…no matter how small…your puppy is protected for life. There is no need for further vaccination.

But be sure to wait at least 3 weeks before running the titer. Otherwise, the vaccine could inhibit titer levels until the immune system adjusts.

Opt for a Vaccine with Less Antigens

When trying to increase your success with the parvovirus vaccine, the vaccine you use is also important.

Polyvalent vaccines immunize against more than one disease component. But they can also increase the risk to your dog.

This is because the more antigens contained in a vaccine, the more viral replication the puppy will experience at once.

As a result, his immune system is stretched to the limit. This could allow one of the antigens to develop into a full-blown disease.

For the greatest success **you want a vaccine with the fewest antigens** – one or two at most. This will increase the chances of your puppy developing antibodies while also reducing adverse effects.

And remember…

Don't be afraid to question your vet on which vaccine he intends to use. Request a monovalent vaccine – one with limited antigens.

Planning Ahead When Choosing the Right Vaccines

While there is a monovalent parvo vaccine, there is no longer a monovalent distemper vaccine.

Schering-Plough still produces a Parvo-Distemper vaccine and this would be the best choice for puppies.

If you run a titer after the initial vaccination and your puppy has responded to the distemper but not the parvo, then there are plenty of monovalent parvo vaccines on the market including Neopar, Schering-Plough Intervet or Pfizer.

At the end of the day parvovirus is a complicated topic with a complicated solution.

Whether you decide to protect your puppy naturally or opt for the parvo vaccine, both options come with their own potential set of consequences.

The decision you choose to make is ultimately up to you.

Don’t allow anyone to make this important decision for you!

What’s crucial is that you decide based on science and not on a false belief – or fear.

Arm yourself with knowledge. Prepare yourself for parvo’s presence. That way you’ll be ready for it and in a good position to help your puppy defeat this enemy.