

CANINE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE

What is coronavirus disease?

Coronavirus disease, sometimes called “corona,” is a viral intestinal infection of dogs which is usually of short duration. However, it may cause considerable discomfort to the dog for a few days. The cause is a virus of the Coronavirus family. Different coronaviruses cause infections in many species of animals and birds. However, humans are not affected by the canine coronavirus.

How is it transmitted?

Infected dogs usually shed the virus in their feces (and possibly saliva) for one to two weeks, sometimes even longer. The virus is then ingested from contaminated food bowls or by direct contact with the infected dog. Crowding and unsanitary conditions favor transmission. The incubation period (from ingestion to clinical signs) is one to five days.

What are the signs of coronavirus disease?

Many infections are subclinical (inapparent) or mild and transient. However, occasional infections and outbreaks are more severe, particularly in young puppies. Mixed infections, for instance with the parvovirus, may intensify the disease. The diarrhea is typically sudden in onset, accompanied by lethargy and decreased appetite. The stool is loose, mushy with a horrible odor, and orange tinted. It may contain blood or mucus.

Are there diseases which can be confused with coronavirus disease?

There are many causes of diarrhea in dogs, all of which may appear similar to coronavirus disease. Severe cases of coronavirus can be easily confused with parvovirus, and they may occur together. Be sure to see your veterinarian promptly if your dog has diarrhea that does not resolve in a few days or is associated with significant lethargy or loss of appetite.

Is there any treatment?

There is no drug that kills the virus. However, as with most viruses, it will run its course in a few days. Antibiotics are usually used because secondary bacterial infections are common. Withholding food until 24 hours after the diarrhea has ceased and gradually reintroducing it may be sufficient. But dehydration may occur and must be corrected with intravenous fluids. It is advisable to seek veterinary assistance in treating this disease.

Can I vaccinate my dog against this disease?

Yes. Canine coronavirus vaccines are available and are part of the routine vaccination program for most veterinarians.