

CANINE INFECTIOUS HEPATITIS

What is canine infectious hepatitis?

The term “hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Canine infectious hepatitis is a specific disease of the liver that is caused by a virus of the Adenovirus family.

Is this virus a threat to me or other animals?

Humans are not affected by the canine infectious hepatitis virus so there is no danger to you or your family members. However, other dogs and other members of the dog family, foxes for example, can be infected.

How is the virus spread?

The hepatitis virus is transmitted in urine, nasal or eye secretions of infected animals. The infected urine or secretions must come in direct contact with the susceptible dog.

What are the clinical signs?

In the mild form the dog may be merely off food, depressed, and have a mild fever. Some of these cases develop a bluish coloration in the corneas of the eyes one to two weeks later. This is often called “hepatitis blue eye.”

Some dogs have respiratory signs, including nasal and eye discharges and coughing. It may be difficult to tell this disease from kennel cough.

In severe cases, usually in puppies, additional signs may exist, including abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, edema (subcutaneous fluid swelling) of the head and neck, and possibly jaundice. Such cases are often fatal.

What is the treatment?

As with most viral infections, there is not a drug that will kill the virus. However, the virus runs its course in a few days to a couple of weeks. Antibiotics are used because secondary bacterial infections are common. Rest, intravenous fluids, and good nursing care are essential in maintaining the dog until it can recover.

Can my dog be vaccinated against this disease?

Yes. Vaccination is very successful. The vaccine for canine infectious hepatitis is part of the routine vaccinations given to puppies. Annual vaccine boosters are necessary to maintain proper immunity.