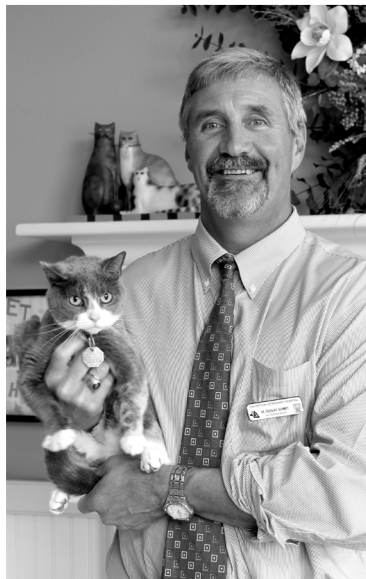


# ASK OUR VET, DR. SCHMIDT



## *What is Canine Distemper Virus?*

Canine distemper virus typically affects young dogs but coyotes, fox, ferrets, skunks, and raccoons can also be susceptible to distemper. Though no longer commonly seen, the virus has by no means disappeared. Distemper virus can be very serious and even fatal, but is preventable by vaccination.

Distemper virus is shed in nasal secretions and thus transmitted primarily by sneezing, but the virus can also be spread by direct contact with contaminated urine, feces or skin. Puppies may contract the disease through the placenta before birth.

Mild forms of the disease may look similar to kennel cough with cough, fever, decreased activity or lethargy and runny nose. Later in the disease, pneumonia, vomiting and diarrhea and neurological changes may develop. Neurologic signs include seizures, staggering or ataxia, and involuntary muscle twitching or spasms of the head or neck. Some dogs may also develop thickened paw pads, eye problems and abnormal enamel production on their teeth.

Dogs show clinical signs approximately 2 weeks after becoming infected, and the symptoms can last for 1-2 weeks. Neurologic changes typically occur 1-3 weeks after sneezing, coughing and fever disappear. Dogs may shed the virus for up to 90 days after infection thus remaining a source of infection to other dogs.

Because it is a virus, there is no specific treatment for canine distemper. The only treatment we can offer is supportive care which may include intravenous fluids, antibiotics for secondary bacterial infections, anti-seizure medication if seizures are present, and sometimes steroids for chronic eye or neurologic issues. Recovery depends on the ability of the animal's immune system to fight off the infection. Dogs can die from distemper virus, and it can cause long term

neurological changes in others.

Distemper virus is a serious illness that typically affects young, unvaccinated dogs. This is why completing a vaccine series in puppies with an effective vaccine product is so important. Periodic vaccination every one to three years in adult dogs is also necessary to prevent the virus from affecting older patients who could still be at risk if their immune systems become stressed. Please make sure to have your puppy evaluated by your veterinarian and make sure that he or she receives a complete vaccine series to prevent serious infections like canine distemper.



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