

**Protect Your Dog - Get it Vaccinated Against Parvovirus**  
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It's been more than two decades since canine parvovirus first appeared. When it first hit our area, things were a real mess. The year was 1979, and dogs everywhere were coming down sick with an unknown and severe gastrointestinal disease.

For many, the infection was fatal, and panic spread throughout the dog world. Breeders were losing whole litters of puppies at a very young age. And no one knew for sure what this virus was all about. As a result, early treatment was truly hit-or-miss and sometimes it wasn't very effective.

We learned a lot about parvo in a short time back then thanks to aggressive work by veterinary schools across the country. California's own vet school at UC Davis was part of the team that helped identify the virus and develop a vaccine to prevent its deadly effects.

Within a few short years, vaccinations all but eliminated parvo. Simple inoculations given at the same time as the traditional distemper vaccines gave dogs complete protection. This huge epidemic was over. The threat of parvo infection was gone. Almost.

Here we are, 27 years later and parvovirus still exists. It hasn't gone away, and this ugly virus still attacks puppies and unvaccinated adult dogs. Every year, vets see infected dogs with the same severe gastrointestinal upset first seen so many years ago.

These unlucky pooches are those that were never vaccinated properly. Puppies born to unprotected mothers are the highest risk. And unfortunately, many of these dogs still die from this disease.

This mimics a similar problem in our human population. Poliovirus was all but eliminated by an effective vaccine a half century ago. Still, this virus periodically rears its ugly head, causing devastating neurologic disease.

Measles and mumps epidemics have also occurred in the past year right here in our own country. Vaccines are available to protect against these diseases, but not everyone receives them.

There are lots of reasons why people don't get their protective vaccines. Some folks refuse inoculations for religious or ethical reasons. Some can't afford them. And for a few, it's a simple case of complacency. They just don't believe they need to get vaccinated. Apathy like this can lead to problems. Routine, simple vaccines help prevent deadly disease. But only if they are used properly.

Complacency and ignorance are the most common reasons puppies become infected with parvo. All too often, we hear pet owners say that they didn't think their dog needed another vaccine booster. After all, when was the last time anyone heard any news of this infection?

Many people think that parvo disease is a thing of the past. Yet every year we see it: a purebred puppy worth a great deal of money (and "worth" even more as a family companion) coming into a clinic sick and dying from this disease. And it all could have been prevented with a simple inexpensive vaccine.

So what should you do if you are looking for a puppy to take home? Make sure the pooch receives all its vaccines. Have him or her examined by a veterinarian and determine what additional preventative measures should be taken. A little prevention can help avoid a catastrophe later on.

Puppies and kittens are so much fun, so warm and cuddly. But they can carry diseases that can be passed to humans. That's why it's so important to take any new family pet to a vet clinic for a physical exam. All new pets, young and old alike, need to be checked for contagious diseases and parasites. Here's an example that shows why this is so very important.

The Wilsons recently adopted a new dog from a rescue shelter. "Dottie" was 9 months old and looked very healthy. But she had trouble with her digestive tract and experienced episodes of intermittent diarrhea. Nevertheless, since she felt so good, her new family decided she didn't need to see a veterinarian. After all, she had already been given all her shots awhile ago, and she had been wormed when she was a young pup.

A few months later, the Wilson's youngest son experienced headaches and dizziness. His doctor couldn't determine the nature of his illness, so he referred the case to a specialist. After a few weeks of tests this 5-year old boy was diagnosed with a case of parasitic roundworms. He had developed a condition called visceral larval migrans and doctors found that roundworm larvae had migrated through his abdomen, affecting his liver function.

Dottie was subsequently checked and found to be carrying large numbers of roundworm eggs in her stool. She had picked up this parasite and brought it with her to her new home. Unfortunately, this infection had found its way into the youngest member of the family. Larval migrans is a very real, and a not-so-unusual disease.

Roundworm larvae can migrate to any of the internal organs, even into the eyes. And their effect can be devastating. Fortunately, the Wilson's little boy recovered quickly and seems to be free of any long-lasting effects of his illness.

But the lesson is clear. If you ever adopt a new pet, whether it's young or old, take it to the veterinarian and have a thorough exam done. This is very important for the health of your new pet and the health of your family and friends.

On a lighter note, did you hear the news about Barney the watchdog? He was assigned to guard a valuable teddy bear collection near London, England. There are many valuable pieces in this collection, including a stuffed bear once owned by Elvis Presley and said to be worth nearly \$75,000. The total collection was valued at almost \$1 million.

That was until watchdog Barney, a Doberman Pinscher, changed his mind about guarding the bears and began tearing up many of the pieces in the museum room. No one knows what got him started, but some say it sounds like a case of teddy bear rage. Ah, to be able to talk with Barney and understand what possibly went through his mind!