

Companion Animal Newsletter Winter 2011



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Parvovirus

Parvovirus is a disease of dogs causing severe vomiting and diarrhea. It is seen most commonly in younger animals, usually unvaccinated or with an incomplete vaccine course. Affected animals have severe vomiting and bloody diarrhea and untreated they die of dehydration. With intensive treatment with IV fluids and antibiotics a reasonable proportion will survive.

Historically, parvovirus appeared out of the blue in the late 1970s and reached New Zealand in the 1980s. At the time I was a recent graduate and worked in a busy small animal practice in central Auckland. We had one hospital ward exclusively for treating parvovirus cases and a nurse treating them only. It was a fulltime (and very unpleasant) job for one person looking after IV drips and cleaning up the animals and cages. I certainly would not want to see that again.

Fortunately, as more and more dogs were vaccinated, the number of cases reduced and it became a sporadic disease. The modern vaccines are very effective at preventing the disease and if used along with appropriate quarantining of all young pups we would not see any cases.

Unfortunately there has been a persistent steady trickle of parvovirus cases and in the first six month of this year we have seen a few more. At the Balclutha clinic we have seen

four cases and a similar number at Milton. Most, but not all, of the treated dogs survived.

Dogs affected by parvovirus pass millions of virus particles in each gram of faeces and continue to do this for a few weeks after they recover. One of the reasons for the disease persisting in the dog population is that the infectious virus particles can remain in the soil, bedding and kennels of an affected dog for several years after it was passed. It is also highly resistant to common disinfectants.

Vaccination of pups is very important for preventing parvovirus and we can advise you on the appropriate course of vaccines. Also very important is preventing contact with infected dogs, or having pups in an area where infected animals were, even if it was several years ago.

It would be great to never see a case of parvovirus ever again, but this will not happen. The disease will be with us for the long-term and sensible precautions need to be continued.

Dog Jackets

Winter is cold and unpleasant for many dogs, especially the short-haired varieties. Often owners comment that their dogs seem stiff and sore moving about on cold days. It is essential that wherever dogs sleep, be it in a kennel or on a porch, should be dry and draft free. The best way to keep dogs

warm if they sleep in a cold area is to do what we would do and put a jacket on them.

I have to admit to being very sceptical about dog jackets in the past, but they have become increasingly popular over the last few years, for good reason. Having owned two short-haired dogs there is no denying they love to have their jackets on when it is cold and never try to remove them. It is worth mentioning in particular the Bull Terrier type dogs which have a reputation as being macho but have very short hair and do feel the cold.

We have a variety of types of jacket in stock, which start in price about \$30.00 for a small, lined jacket. They come in a variety of styles and colours. For the more fashion conscious dog there are Driza Bone jackets, with pockets for carrying water bottles or treats. Some jackets have fur collars for the ultimate in luxury!

Rat Bait

Rat bait poisoning is more frequent in the winter. As rodents move inside in the cold weather house owners put bait out. There are a variety of brands of rat bait, but the poisonings we see are due to wafarin based poison. Wafarin is an anticoagulant poison that acts by blocking the recycling of four of the twelve clotting factors in the blood. It has a delayed onset of action of several days, and small doses eaten over several days tend to be more toxic than a single larger dose.

The symptoms seen depend on where bleeding occurs and it is not always obvious. Recently Midge, an 18 month old Fox Terrier presented as a coughing, depressed dog. There was rat bait on the property but the owners felt confident the dog had no access to it. An X-ray showed that Midge had one lung that was not air filled. This could have been due to infection or trauma but was due to haemorrhage into the lung because of rat bait. A blood test showed a prolonged clotting time typical of wafarin poisoning and Midge made a good recovery when given the antidote, Vitamin K.

This case emphasises two important points.

- 1) In many cases there is no known access to rat bait and in some cases the source is never found.
- 2) Rat bait poisoning can cause symptoms that look like many other diseases. In the past this has included pain due to bleeding into joints mimicking arthritis and paralysis caused by haemorrhage into the spinal cord mimicking disc disease.

You should contact us immediately if you suspect your dog has eaten rat bait. If ingestion has occurred in the last hour or two vomiting can be induced by giving an injection of an emetic. If it is unclear whether a toxic dose of the drug was absorbed before vomiting, or there is a suspicion that poison may have been eaten over more than a few hours ago, then a blood test can be taken to detect the toxicity before bleeding starts.

The take home messages are:

- 1) Rat bait should be put in areas dogs cannot get at it.
- 2) The bait should be checked regularly to see that it is still safely hidden.
- 3) Laid bait should be safely disposed of rather than forgotten about at the end of winter.

Cross bred dogs

Recently a friend from up north told me he had a new dog, which was a 'hoodledor'. This apparently is a designer

crossbreed of a Wheaten Terrier X Poodle X Labrador. There are a lot of other crossbreds with interesting names. Some of them are below.

- Pointer X Setter = Poinsetter, a traditional Christmas dog.
- Kerry Blue Terrier X Skye Blue Terrier = Blue Sky Terrier, a dog for visionaries.
- Labrador Retriever X Curly Coated Retriever = Lab Coat Retriever, a breed for scientists.
- Newfoundland X Bassett Hound = Newfound Asset Hound, a breed for investors.
- Bull Terrier X Bulldog = Terribull, a dog that makes awful mistakes.
- Bloodhound X Labrador = Blabrador, an incessant barker.
- Malamute X Pointer = Moot Point, owned by....oh well it doesn't matter anyway.
- Collie X Malamute = Commute, a dog that travels to work.
- Deerhound X Terrier = Derriere, a dog that is faithful to the end.
- Bull Terrier X Shitzu = Bullshitz, a gregarious but unreliable breed.

Arthritis

Last year in the winter newsletter I wrote about arthritis because every winter we see dogs come in with arthritic pain worsened by the cold weather. I was not intending to repeat it this year, but the arrival of a new drug for arthritis has made me reconsider.

There are a number of problems with treating arthritis effectively in the long term for our canine patients, especially large dogs. The biggest problems are:

- 1) The difficulty of administering medication to some dogs
- 2) Remembering to give medication daily.
- 3) Getting more medication when it runs out.
- 4) Cost.

We believe that many dogs miss out on the benefits of pain relief due to the reasons above and as a consequence suffer unnecessary pain.

Trocoxil is a solution to many of these problems. After the first two treatments it is a monthly medication given for 6 months then a gap of one month. This is much easier than medicating daily. The drug is cheaper than Rimadyl or Metacam, and is equally effective.

There are pitfalls and occasional problems with any medication and every case is different, but most dogs on or needing long term treatment for arthritis will be better off changing to Trocoxil. We are offering clients the option of having their treatment mailed monthly when the treatment is due.

If you would like to discuss whether this is the right medication for your dog, please call the clinic and make an appointment. For dogs already on Rimadyl or Metacam, we can discuss the option of changing medication when your prescription is due for renewal.

Finally, this medication is only for dogs and cannot be used in cats.