

Sickness in Puppies – A Veterinarian’s View

When puppies get sick they can become more severely affected than adult dogs.

Just like in a human baby, a puppy’s immune system isn’t fully developed and he is more vulnerable to disease. If your puppy is showing any signs of illness, it is best to get him to the veterinarian as soon as possible for medical intervention.

Critical symptoms to watch for in puppies are:

- Loss of appetite
- Severe lethargy
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Some of these symptoms may be due to a mild problem such as intestinal parasites or a stomach upset from a new treat. But if these signs are ignored for too long, a puppy could become severely ill.

Poor appetite, vomiting and diarrhea in puppies leads to severe dehydration and hypoglycemia more rapidly than in adult dogs. This compounds a normally simple problem and can lead to prolonged and expensive hospital stays.

Even more worrisome, these symptoms may be the first signs of a more severe disease such as [parvovirus](#). Even if you have kept your puppy up to date on vaccines, they aren’t considered fully immune until the last vaccine is given at around 4 months of age. Parvo is extremely contagious and can cause critical illness or even death in puppies.

Treatment is more successful when diagnosis is made early. The first sign is often a lack of appetite, so if your puppy is not eating for more than one day you should get to the vet. This is followed by the more obvious signs of profuse diarrhea and vomiting. By then puppies are pretty sick and will require more aggressive treatment.

Coughing is another important symptom to watch for in puppies.

In adult dogs, sudden onset of a cough is usually due to kennel cough. While the cough is frequent and sounds very dramatic, adult dogs typically feel okay and can clear the infection with minimal intervention. Young puppies may not be able to fight these simple infections quite so quickly and their disease may progress to pneumonia, which is infection in the lungs.

In addition to coughing, pneumonia causes fast or labored breathing, loss of appetite, lethargy and fever. In addition to a host of antibiotics, your puppy may require hospitalization for oxygen therapy, nebulization, and IV fluids. Pneumonia can be fatal if not addressed in a timely manner

Many severe illnesses in puppies are contagious. It is very important that your puppy be [socialized](#) with other dogs and allowed outdoors for training and conditioning purposes. But this should be done cautiously. Do not allow your puppy to be in contact with dogs that have unknown health and vaccination status. Avoid heavily populated areas such as dog parks or crowded kennels until your puppy is older and fully vaccinated.

If you notice that your puppy is 'off' in any way, it is always best to err on the side of caution and get to the vet. In most cases the problem will have a simple fix and he will be back to his normal self in no time. But if a serious disease is brewing, your vet will be able to intervene quickly and give your pup the best chance at recovery.

Author: Dr. Megan Teiber, DVM

(Written exclusively for Fidosavvy.com)