

MUST-KNOW FACTS ABOUT CANINE DISTEMPER



Some areas of Canada have seen increased cases of **canine distemper (CD)** recently in puppies and other unvaccinated dogs, which is why pet owners and veterinarians should be on an increased alert for this important disease. There is no known risk of transmitting this disease to humans.



Canine distemper is a **highly contagious viral disease** that affects domestic dogs, ferrets, and can infect wildlife (including raccoons, coyotes, wolves, foxes and skunks). It is caused by canine distemper virus (CDV).



Vaccines are the best way to prevent canine distemper. This disease is rarely seen in Canadian dogs that are routinely vaccinated, but occurs more frequently in puppies and unvaccinated dogs.



Puppies and unvaccinated dogs are at highest risk of canine distemper.

CD can affect dogs of all ages, but is most common in puppies less than 4 months of age and in unvaccinated dogs. The disease can be fatal in some cases.

Canine distemper virus is spread most commonly through respiratory droplets.

The virus is spread through close contact with infected animals, most commonly from respiratory droplets and less commonly from urine or feces. The virus does not survive well in the environment, but there is still potential risk of spread via contaminated items like bowls and toys.



Dogs can shed the virus for weeks without looking sick.

Dogs that have recovered from distemper can still shed the virus for weeks to months. Some dogs can be infected and **shed the virus** for weeks **without showing any clinical signs**.

Early Signs (1-2 weeks after infection)

- Fever, lethargy, decreased appetite
- Eye or nose discharge (thick and yellow)
- Coughing, sneezing, difficulty breathing
- Vomiting, diarrhea

Most recovered dogs will not have any long term effects following recovery from CD

Delayed Signs (1-3 weeks after recovery from early signs)

- **Neurological signs**
 - Seizures, circling, muscle twitching, paralysis
 - These signs can overlap with respiratory signs
 - Some dogs develop neurological signs without any of the early signs of CD, sometimes months after exposure
- **Thickening and hardening** of paw pads and nose
- **Damaged tooth enamel** can make teeth more sensitive and prone to dental issues

CANINE DISTEMPER IS A VACCINE PREVENTABLE DISEASE

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Treatment of CD affected dogs is limited to supportive care.

CD can make puppies and dogs very sick. Supportive care is used to treat CD affected dogs to manage dehydration, gastrointestinal or neurological signs.

Severely affected dogs or those with neurological signs are more likely to die from CD. Dogs who do not have neurological signs that are treated right away can fully recover. However, some dogs that recover from acute CD can still have neurological disease later in life.

Prevention of CD is key! This can be easily achieved by **vaccinating your puppies and dogs.**

Vaccinations are safe and highly effective against CDV.

Make sure your puppy and dog are fully vaccinated. Talk to your veterinarian about vaccination schedules. Female breeding dogs should be vaccinated to transfer temporary (passive) immunity to protect puppies.

Do research before you adopt or purchase a dog.

Ask the breeder or rescue organization (Canadian or international) for proof of CDV vaccination. Make sure you inquire about how much recent contact the dog has had with unvaccinated dogs or dogs with unknown vaccine status.

Limit contact of unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated dogs with other dogs, especially at off-leash dog parks where there are many dogs of unknown vaccine status.



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Sources:

<https://www.uwsheltermedicine.com/library/resources/canine-distemper-cdv>
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