
Canine Distemper Fact Sheet for Foster Homes

SDHS Canine Distemper Virus Fact Sheet for Fosters

General Information

Canine Distemper virus (CDV) is a highly contagious disease that affects unvaccinated dogs, ferrets, and several wildlife species. CDV is primarily classified as a respiratory virus but can affect various parts of the body including the respiratory, gastrointestinal, and nervous systems. If Distemper symptoms are treated successfully until the dog is beyond the shedding phase of the virus, prognosis is generally very good and may even result in partial or complete immunity. Neurologic symptoms are more difficult to treat, usually carry a far worse prognosis and may even be fatal. Unfortunately, it is impossible to predict or prevent neurologic forms of CDV, but in the absence of these signs, most dogs can recover nicely with basic supportive care. The recovery process can be lengthy (several weeks to months), which is why we rely on the help of our dedicated fosters to help us care for these patients.

Who can get Distemper?

In the shelter setting, unvaccinated puppies and less often unvaccinated adult dogs are the ones we worry about. Humans do not get Distemper but can spread the disease through contaminated fomites (inanimate objects such as clothes and shoes). Although Distemper mainly occurs in dogs; it can also affect ferrets and some species of wild animals such as raccoons and skunks . It is not contagious to domestic cats. Removing feces from the yard and picking up food and water bowls out at night will help eliminate accidental spread to wildlife.

Transmission

CDV is highly contagious and usually spreads similar to the common cold, through contact with respiratory secretions and aerosols. Infected dogs can shed the virus in their urine and feces too. Unvaccinated dogs can also get CDV through sharing water bowls, touching noses, or being in the same place at the same time as dogs with CDV. Fortunately, CDV does not live very long in the environment. The virus usually does not live more than a few days outside a living host, but it can live longer on wet surfaces, such as in food bowls or on water-soaked toys. Routine washing with soap and water and most disinfectants are very effective in killing off CDV from contaminated surfaces.

Prevention

The Distemper vaccine comes in many forms (DHPP/DAPP/DHLPP) and is considered very effective. The vaccine usually provides partial immunity immediately, and full immunity in 3 days. As long as your resident dog(s) are healthy adults (over 2 years old) and have received multiple Distemper vaccines, including a recent one within the past 3 years, they should have adequate protection against CDV. If you take home a dog who is CDV exposed, or has CDV, your personal dog(s) and any dog(s) that may come in contact (even through a fence) with your



foster must be fully-vaccinated adults.

A fully-vaccinated dog is a one who has received at least 2 DHPP, DHLPP or DAPP vaccines, one of which was given within the last 3 years and at the age of 4 months or older. Please check with your regular veterinarian to make sure your dog(s) meet these criteria before taking home a Distemper foster. In addition to being fully vaccinated, make sure that any resident dog(s) are healthy and not on any medications that may compromise their immune system.

For dogs that are Distemper exposed, or have Distemper, it is important that you follow the following precautions:

- Do not let the dog interact with any other dogs that you are not 100% sure are fully vaccinated.
- Do not take the dog out in public or on walks.
- Do not let them sniff other dogs through a fence, or share water bowls with other dogs.
- Do not leave water or food bowls outside where they can be accessed by wildlife or other dogs.
- Follow all SDHS veterinary recommendations and administer any SDHS prescribed medications as instructed by our Medical Team.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis of CDV is based on symptoms and confirmed with PCR testing. The list of possible symptoms for CDV is long because it can attack multiple parts of the body, even at the same time. It is often difficult to predict how symptoms will present, but once the dog starts to show recovery, symptoms usually continue to disappear rather than get worse again.

Symptoms of CDV may include:

- Cough/chest congestion, snotty nose/nasal discharge, nasal congestion, pneumonia
- Not eating/loss of interest in food, vomiting
- Extreme lethargy or fatigue
- Diarrhea (sometimes bloody)
- Eye discharge/decreased tear production/squinting/not wanting to open eyes/crust around the eyes
- Fever
- Neurologic signs such as seizures or twitching

****Twitching -** Twitching can be considered a separate symptom since it can be semi-permanent. A twitch that is changing, worsening, or new should be considered a new symptom. If a rhythmic, unchanging Distemper twitch is present, it may be a longer term, residual symptom of the virus.

Treatment and Prognosis

CDV is a virus which has no cure. Instead, we do everything we can to treat the symptoms until the virus passes. Typically, a Distemper dog will receive supportive care in our veterinary hospital until they are free of symptoms. By the time they are ready for foster, they should be exhibiting little to no symptoms and we are just waiting until the test results show that the virus has passed. It is rare, but if your foster dog begins to show new or worsening symptoms, the foster and wellness team should be contacted immediately so we can schedule a veterinary exam at our shelter. Development



of neurologic symptoms is usually indicative of a more severe CDV infection. Prognosis is difficult to predict because the Distemper virus acts differently in each dog.

Decontamination/Sanitation

Distemper does not live long in the environment, but it is still an infectious disease. If you have a dog that is Distemper exposed, or has Distemper, we recommend being vigilant about

picking up poop, washing dishes the dog uses, washing beds and towels, and cleaning with a

disinfectant, such as Lysol or Simple Green. Remember that even if your Distemper foster dog appears healthy, he/she could still be shedding large amounts of virus through saliva, the nose, the urine, and feces.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I prepare for a Distemper foster dog, and what type of setup should I have?

A home without any dogs is safest, but if you do have a dog, be sure to check with your veterinarian to ensure they are healthy and up-to-date on their vaccines. Make sure to prevent contact within 10 feet of other dogs. Check your yard to prevent "through the fence" contact with neighbors' dogs. Pick up water bowls outside so wildlife won't be exposed. Providing a foster home is one of the best things you can do for a Distemper dog. The enrichment and socialization they receive from you is excellent for their mental and physical well-being.

Can I foster other dogs after having a Distemper foster dog?

Yes, but only after the Distemper foster dog is gone. Unlike the Parvo virus, the Distemper virus doesn't survive well in the environment, as long there is no standing water anywhere. We ask that you wait at least 3 days and make sure that any shared surfaces, toys, or bedding are disposed or thoroughly cleaned and dried before bringing a new foster dog into the home.

Is there anything I should avoid doing with the dog?

Avoid any contact (within 10 feet) of other dogs that you don't know with absolute certainty have been well-vaccinated against Distemper. Do not go out to dog parks, pet stores, vets, restaurants, cafes etc. Your Distemper-foster should not leave your property for walks either.

Can I have a doggie play-date in the home if I know the dog is fully-vaccinated?

No, this isn't a good idea even if the other dog(s) are vaccinated. If a dog is not well vaccinated against Distemper, there is a risk of transmission. If you have pet dogs in the home, it's best to keep them separated from your Distemper foster if you can. Your Distemper foster is also likely to be more vulnerable to other canine infectious disease and will not have the added protection of booster vaccines until they are recovered. Vaccines can interfere with test results, which is why we will wait to give booster shots until your foster pup tests negative for CDV.

