Veterinary Alert - Canine Parvovirus Infection

9 November 2015

As we approach the warmer months of the year, an increase in the incidence of canine parvovirus infection can be expected. Greyhound Racing South Australia recently advised of a confirmed case of the disease on the property of a registered participant.

Canine parvovirus is an important cause of illness and mortality primarily affecting pups between six weeks and six months of age. The virus attacks rapidly dividing cells, particularly those of the intestine, lymphoid tissue and bone marrow. This causes a loss of appetite and depression and leads to vomiting, diarrhoea (progressing to haemorrhagic), immune suppression and potentially shock, sepsis and death.

Parvovirus is highly contagious and is spread through ingestion of viral particles from an environment which has been contaminated by infected faecal material. The virus is very resistant, remaining for years in the environment. For this reason, properties which have had infections should not allow the presence of dogs which have not completed their course of vaccines. The period between exposure and demonstration of clinical signs is usually between five – ten days.

Any young dog showing sign of illness must be taken to a veterinarian, as it is a severe disease that can cause great suffering. In the absence of treatment survival rates are estimated at 9% of cases. With prompt and aggressive treatment survival rates of 65% – 95% have been reported.

The most significant risk factor for contracting parvovirus is an inadequate initial vaccine course. Although not currently mandatory, three parvovirus vaccinations should be administered by your veterinarian.

The first vaccination should be administered at six-eight weeks, a second at 10-12 weeks and a third at 14-16 weeks. It is important to attempt to protect the pup from a young age with the initial vaccination; however, the interference of maternal antibodies may render the vaccine ineffective in which case the pup will remain unprotected until the second or even third vaccine.

Other risk factors for parvovirus infection include over-crowded conditions, stress associated with weaning and concurrent infection with parasites such as worms and coccidia.

Any confirmed or suspected cases of canine parvovirus in a racing greyhound must be promptly reported to Greyhound Racing NSW (GRNSW) under rule 105A of the GRNSW Greyhound Racing Rules.

Please make reports by telephone on (02) 8767 0500 or emailing vets@grnsw.com.au and providing your name and contact number. The identity of reporting parties will be treated with sensitivity but reports are necessary for disease surveillance purposes.