

April 25, 2016

According to multiple sources, there has been a report of Parvo Virus exposure at the Niceville Dog Park. Exposure is defined when a dog showing symptoms of Parvo and testing positive for Parvo has come in contact with other dogs. While this is 'News', it is not 'New'. Parvo virus is always present in our environment. It can be found in your own front yard if an infected dog is walking down the street.

Just like the common cold, Parvo virus is highly contagious, but unlike the cold it can be fatal to our dogs and it is very expensive to treat. It causes severe vomiting and bloody diarrhea. When a dog has Parvo, it will shed the virus in its stool or when it throws up. The dog will dirty its paws and fur with the vomiting and diarrhea, and then it will carry the infection to other places. Any place that dogs are walked can be a source for the Parvo infection. The more dogs that frequent a place, the increased likelihood that Parvo or other diseases will be present.

It can be found at stores that welcome dogs and grooming facilities as well as boarding facilities. The virus is very hard to kill because it has a shell that protects it. Only bleach can break through that shell. While the virus can be killed with bleach, bleach is inactivated when it touches organic material such as soil, dirt or plant material. That means hard surfaces like floors, walls, tables and chairs can be cleaned, but yards and grass cannot. While Niceville is careful to keep the dog park as clean as possible, it is beyond the scope of anyone to eliminate Parvo from the soil. The virus is endemic to the United States. It will always be present in the soil.

**Preventive measures that can be taken include:**

**1) Having your dog vaccinated.** Dogs should be vaccinated against Parvo beginning at six weeks of age. They should receive a Parvo vaccine every three weeks until they are four months of age. This is very important. If a dog does not get the last Parvo vaccine at four months of age, it may be susceptible to the virus even as an adult.

The vaccine should be repeated at one year of age. After the first year, the parvo vaccine must be given every one to three years depending on which brand of vaccine your veterinarian carries. Puppies are more susceptible to Parvo Virus. **Until your dog had received its last vaccinations at four months of age it should not go to the dog park.**

**2) Not taking your dog to the dog park if it is sick.** If your dog is vomiting or has soft or loose stool, do not expose your dog to public places such as parks or places where dogs frequent. Be a responsible pet owner and keep your dog at home until you are sure it is well.

**3) If your dog is very old consider avoiding group settings** that could expose your dog to viruses that its immune system can no longer handle.

The Dog Park is a wonderful addition to our community, but we must use caution and take care to have our pet properly vaccinated and protected before taking part.