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PYOMETRA (infected uterus)

What is pyometra and why does it occur?

Pyometra is an infection of the uterus. It usually occurs in older female dogs (and more rarely in cats) that have recently been in season in the previous 1 to 2 months.

The problem occurs due to the effects of hormones (particularly progesterone) in the uterus. These hormones increase secretions from glands in the uterus and are actually preparing the lining of the uterus to accept and be ready for possible pregnancy. The amount of glandular secretions increase each time the bitch is in season and the environment they create becomes more suitable for bacteria colonisation as well.

There are other situations that can predispose a dog to an infection of the uterus. These include the use of drugs containing either progesterone or oestrogen.

What are the signs of pyometra?

The clinical signs of an infection in the uterus can range from depression and lethargy to a lack of appetite or drinking and urinating more. In some cases (but not all) there is a discharge from the vulva. If a discharge occurs it may be noted as a pus or blood on your pet's fur or maybe on the floor or bedding where she has been lying. Sometimes if your pet is continually cleaning and licking herself this discharge may not be seen.

As the bacteria in the uterus grow and die they release toxins that circulate around the body which can be life threatening. If the infection continues without treatment your pet can show signs of weakness, collapse and shock.

How do we diagnose this disease in your pet?

To diagnose this disease your veterinarian may need to do blood tests, radiographs or an ultrasound of your pet.



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How do we treat pyometra?

Unfortunately this infection can not be treated by antibiotics alone. The best treatment for this problem is to have emergency surgery to remove the infected uterus (an ovariohysterectomy or spay). Because animals are often so ill when they come in to the hospital, they are started on intravenous fluids and antibiotics before surgery to try to minimise any complications. Most animals will continue to a complete recovery after surgery and are usually able to go home within 2-3 days of surgery. Most of the complications that can occur usually relate to how ill your pet is before surgery and how much the infection in the uterus has affected other parts of the body (such as her kidneys or liver).

What if I want to still breed from my pet?

This disease can be treated medically but this is only recommended if your pet is young and still healthy and if you intend to breed from her at her next season. The medical treatment usually requires hospitalisation in the first few days, can be just as expensive as the surgical treatment and can have complications which could still require surgery. The medical treatment does not completely cure the problem which is why your pet would need to be bred at her next season to avoid the same infection in her uterus happening again.

How do I avoid this problem occurring?

To avoid this problem it is recommend to desex your pet early. If you do not intend to breed with your pet then desexing is best done at 6-9 months of age. If you do intend to breed from your pet then desexing is advised as soon as she is no longer going to be used for breeding purposes (generally less than 6 years of age).