

HEMORRHAGIC GASTROENTERITIS

What is canine hemorrhagic gastroenteritis?

Hemorrhagic gastroenteritis (HGE) is an acute disorder of dogs characterized by vomiting and bloody diarrhea.

How is HGE diagnosed?

The diagnosis of HGE may be challenging and may ultimately require intestinal biopsies in persistent cases. Some possible causes of HGE include stomach or intestinal ulcers, trauma, gastrointestinal tumors or obstruction, foreign bodies, infectious diseases such as canine parvovirus infection and coagulation disorders. Evaluation usually requires a complete blood count, biochemical analysis of the blood, urinalysis, x-rays, coagulation tests, fecal evaluation, and ultrasound or endoscopic examination of the gastrointestinal tract.

HGE is most common in small breed dogs. The packed cell volume or hematocrit is often above 60% in dogs with HGE. Most normal dogs have a hematocrit of 37-55%. The elevated hematocrit provides an important clue that the patient may have HGE.

What causes it?

The exact cause of HGE remains unknown.

How is it treated?

Dogs with HGE will appear severely ill and, if untreated, may die. In most cases, the disorder appears to run its course in a few days if the dog is given appropriate supportive care. Intravenous fluid therapy provides the foundation of HGE therapy. Subcutaneous fluids (given under the skin) are not usually considered adequate to meet the significant fluid requirements of most dogs with HGE.

If intravenous fluid therapy is not given, the dog's red blood count will continue to elevate due to dehydration. In this situation, the dog is at risk for a potentially fatal clotting disorder called disseminated intravascular coagulation (DIC). Once DIC has begun, it is often irreversible and may result in death.

Additional therapy for HGE may include antibiotics, anti-ulcer medications and corticosteroids.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM.
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