Parvovirus: Not just for the dogs
Matt Sheehan | Media Relations Coordinator
Print Version

If you're a dog owner, you've probably heard of the Parvovirus.

The Parvovirus vaccine is common and recommended for all dogs, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association.

But recently, the human parvovirus B19 has spread through the news cycle with the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) issuing a health alert on August 13, not to be confused with the canine parvovirus CPV-2 strain.

What is Parvovirus?

It's nothing new, says Doug Kasper, MD, an infectious disease specialist with OSF HealthCare.

"It's a seasonal viral infection and it's spread by respiratory droplets," according to Dr. Kasper. "The majority of people will be exposed in childhood. Daycares, schools and any setting where you have kids together, touching each other and common equipment, you'll see Parvovirus spread."

Symptoms and treatments

The main symptom is a rash that appears on the cheek, referred to as "slapped cheek rash."

"Right now, we're seeing an increase in Parvovirus cases, but there is some bias to that. We don't routinely check kids for Parvovirus because it's a self-limiting illness. Some kids will get a rash, some will get a fever or not feel well for a bit of time," Dr. Kasper says. "But it usually resolves within a week, and it resolves with supportive care like hydration, sleep and maybe some Tylenol."

Dr. Kasper says the "uptick" in cases in the U.S. stems from an increased number of cases in Europe earlier this year. That has prompted health officials to send tests off because they're prompted to, whereas they haven't done so in the past.

The treatment of parvovirus lands in the realm of common sense. Monitor yourself and your child's symptoms, wash your hands and stay home when sick. With the virus spread through respiratory droplets, sanitizing commonly touched surfaces is a good idea.

Who is most at risk?

The greatest risk concern is for pregnant women, because mothers can pass parvovirus to the fetus.

"There can be, especially in the first trimester, associated risks with the fetus that would require monitoring with ultrasounds to see if there is a severe infection. There are also older populations that are immunocompromised, specifically those with sickle cell anemia, where Parvovirus can cause problems with anemias or blood cell lines," Dr. Kasper says.

Parvovirus and dogs

While the human and canine strains of parvovirus are different, Dr. Kasper says viral infections can come from pets, and that's not limited to just the parvovirus. But he says he's not worried about the transfer of the virus from dogs to people, because the parvovirus can't actively change between the two.