



EHRlichia

Ehrlichiosis is an infectious disease of dogs first seen in military dogs coming back from Vietnam in the 70's. It is also known as "Tropical Pancytopenia". The disease-causing organism is a rickettsia called Ehrlichia canis, which is similar to bacteria. It infects white blood cells of the host and different types of Ehrlichia infect and live within different types of white cells. Ehrlichia are spread through tick bites, with the brown dog tick being the main source of infection.

There are three phases of the disease, including the acute, sub-clinical and chronic stage. The acute phase lasts about two to four weeks, during which a fever, swollen lymph nodes, respiratory distress, bleeding disorders, weight loss and nervous system abnormalities are observed. During this phase the organism is replicating and attaching to white blood cell membranes. Most dogs will clear the organism on their own, but some move on to the second stage of infection. Next, the sub-clinical phase begins and no clinical signs are apparent. This is because the organism is "hiding" out in the spleen and this phase can last for months or years with no indication of infection beyond a reduced platelet count and maybe an increased Globulin level (from prolonged immune system stimulation). The dog may continue to shed Ehrlichia during this stage, either eliminating it fully from the body or progressing to the chronic stage.

The last stage of the disease results in anemia, blood clotting problems, lameness, eye problems, swollen limbs and nervous system problems.

A blood test can be done to determine exposure to Ehrlichia, and this is usually a Heartworm/Lyme/Ehrlichia combination test. A test will not show a positive result for two to three weeks after contact, and a positive test does not indicate an Ehrlichia infection. A dog with clinical signs that tests positive for exposure to the organism can be treated. It is recommended that dogs with suspected infections receive a combination of PCR testing and antibody titers to confirm it. Sometimes the Ehrlichia can be seen on a blood smear and the diagnosis can be made that way. A combination of clinical signs, blood testing and PCR is the best method of disease confirmation.

Treating Ehrlichiosis starts with correcting severe anemia or bleeding problems. Tetracycline antibiotics (Doxycycline used most) are effective against intracellular blood parasites, and usually at least a month of treatment is necessary. If the infected dog has immune-mediated secondary reactions to the Ehrlichia then a corticosteroid may be prescribed until the antibiotics start working.

It is possible for dogs to become infected again after completing treatment because immunity doesn't last after infection. Preventing Ehrlichia infection includes eliminating contact with ticks, either by avoidance or using products such as K9 Advantix and Frontline or Preventic collars to detach ticks quickly.

For more information on Ehrlichia Please [CLICK HERE](#)