

Puppy Strangles

Juvenile cellulitis, juvenile pyoderma, and puppy strangles all refer to the same skin condition that affects young puppies between 4 and 16 weeks of age. Usually, several puppies in the same litter are affected.

Golden Retrievers, Gordon Setters, Yellow Labrador Retrievers, and Dachshunds seem to be predisposed to this condition although it can affect other breeds, including mix-breed dogs as well. The exact cause of juvenile cellulitis is not clear, it is suspected to be an immune system abnormality. Most cases of juvenile cellulitis are considered to be an inflammatory immune process of unknown cause.

Symptoms of Puppy Strangles

Typically, you will see sudden swelling on the face, lips, ear flaps, or eyelids if your young puppy is affected. The swelling is then followed by the rapid development of pimple-like pustules, which rupture and bleed, forming skin ulcers and crusts. Usually, the inner surface of the ear flaps are involved as well and occasionally lesions in other body areas occur. These lesions can be painful and if left untreated, serious scarring and permanent hair loss can result.

Other symptoms associated with this puppy skin condition include:

- Fever
- Swelling of the joints
- Loss of appetite
- Depression and lethargy

There may be swelling and enlargement of the lymph nodes beneath the chin as well. Sometimes the puppy may have difficulty eating and swallowing because of the enlarged lymph nodes making the condition life-threatening. Therefore, they must be treated by a veterinarian immediately.

DON'T SQUEEZE! Do not try to squeeze the pus from the sores - scarring will likely result if you do that!

Treatment

Because this condition is believed to be an immune-mediated disease (i.e. the puppy's immune system is overly-active) high doses of oral corticosteroids (such as prednisone) are usually given to suppress the immune system. In most cases, the puppy will respond after several days of treatment. The condition generally resolves in 10 to 14 days. However, steroid treatment normally lasts longer and cannot be stopped abruptly even though improvement is seen, so treatment should continue with gradual tapering of the dose.

Antibiotics may be needed for any secondary infection. However, please note that antibiotics alone are not effective and cannot treat this condition.

Relapse of the condition after treatment is rare.