

HAEMORRHAGIC GASTRO ENTERITIS (HGE)

What is Haemorrhagic Gastroenteritis (HGE)?

This is a sudden onset of bloody diarrhoea and /or vomiting and most commonly occurs in small breeds of dogs and also more commonly in older dogs. The severity of the vomiting and diarrhoea will often cause very rapid dehydration, collapse and weakness. In severe cases, death can occur if not treated.

How is HGE diagnosed?

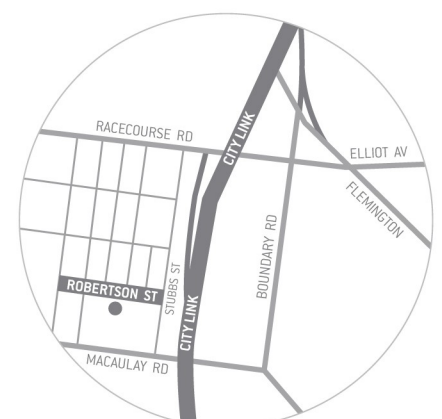
The diagnosis of HGE is by exclusion, meaning other possible causes of vomiting blood and/or bloody diarrhoea must first be considered. Some of these other possible causes include:

- Infectious disease such as parvovirus – seen more often in young or unvaccinated dogs.
- Gastric ulcers – often will have had prior clinical signs such as lack of appetite or abdominal pain.
- Gastrointestinal obstruction – usually this causes vomiting rather than diarrhoea and there is a history of intermittent vomiting or abdominal pain.
- Bleeding disorders – such as can occur after eating rat bait.
- Inflammatory bowel disease – usually have a history of waxing and waning diarrhoea or vomiting
- Intestinal cancer – usually have a history of weight loss associated with either vomiting or diarrhoea

Evaluation of these other causes might require full blood tests, urinalysis, radiographs or an abdominal ultrasound, faecal evaluation or endoscopic evaluation of the stomach and intestines. Because the costs of all these tests could be significant, it is sometimes prudent

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to treat the dog for at least 24 hours with supportive care first and if there is no response to this to start further testing.

Why does it occur?

The exact mechanism for HGE remains unknown. It may be related to bacterial or viral causes – but it does not appear to be a contagious disease at all. Dietary changes, or foods that may be too rich or fatty for dogs, especially as they get older, may be associated with this disease. It is also often associated with stress.

How do we treat Haemorrhagic Gastroenteritis?

Very rarely can this disease be treated at home. The severity and fast onset of the disease can lead to life threatening blood loss and dehydration. We treat haemorrhagic gastroenteritis with medications such as intravenous fluids for rehydration, anti-nausea drugs and antibiotics if required. In some very severe cases we may also need to give blood transfusions. They are monitored closely in the intensive care unit until they recover and usually dogs respond well to therapy and are eating and drinking again within 72 hours.

What is required after treatment?

For the first 4 to 6 days at home (or until your dog is passing normal stool), your dog should be fed small meals often of a bland, low fat diet – such as boiled, steamed or microwaved skinless chicken and boiled rice or pasta – before gradually being weaned back onto their regular diet.

It is recommended that fatty foods be banned for life – this includes any table scraps, bones, ham, chops and sausages.

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