



Preventing the spread of disease at Dogs Victoria Events

Anywhere that dogs come together in groups, there is the risk of them being exposed to all sorts of infectious agents and the potential for the transmission of disease. Whether at a boarding kennel, the dog park, at a show or trial, or even at the local café, the proximity of other dogs is the number one risk factor for spreading disease.

Dogs Victoria's events, by their very nature, bring dogs from many different places together and put them in close proximity for the duration of the event. Whether the event is at an indoor or outdoor venue, there is potential for dogs to be exposed to disease-causing pathogens, and for competing dogs and handlers to inadvertently carry disease home with them.

There is a lot that you can do to keep your dogs safer, and to prevent the spread of disease.

Understanding how disease is spread

Disease in dogs can be caused by a variety of parasites, viruses, bacteria, fungi, and protozoa. These infectious agents are called 'pathogens'. Some pathogens need direct (or close) contact with an infected dog for spread to occur, but others can survive and be transmitted via contaminated equipment, indoor areas, surfaces or even remain in the outdoor environment.

Our pets are exposed to potentially infective agents every day, even if they don't leave home!



Whether or not they develop a disease and get sick depends on many factors:

- » **The dog's general health** – if the dog is fit and healthy it is more likely to be able to fend off disease. Dogs that are stressed, have a poor diet, have existing health issues, or are very young or very old are more likely to get sick if exposed to disease.
- » **The type of pathogen** – some diseases are very 'virulent' meaning they spread easily and may quickly cause significant disease, others are 'less virulent'. Some infectious agents (like canine parvovirus) can survive in the environment outside the dog for a very long time, others will be killed quickly once they leave the body and will no longer pose a threat.
- » **The 'dose' the dog receives** - The amount of the infectious agent that the dog is exposed to is also a factor and this varies both with the length of time they are in contact and the actual amount of the infectious agent that they are exposed to.
- » **The way the disease is transmitted** – Disease agents may be spread via coughing and sneezing, direct dog-to-dog contact, through saliva, droppings, urine, or other bodily fluids. Others are transmitted via parasites or even vermin.
- » **The dog's immunity to the disease** – we vaccinate dogs to provide protection from the main 'killer' dog diseases, and they develop natural immunity to many other diseases over time. However, some dogs may have lowered or compromised immunity. Examples include young puppies, elderly dogs, dogs that are physically or mentally stressed, and dogs that have other ongoing health issues.

Most diseases have an incubation period of 3-10 days. This is the time when the animal has been infected and the pathogen is multiplying within the body but there are no signs or symptoms of the dog being unwell.

During this incubation period, the pathogen may be shed from the body in a variety of ways (for example; in the dog's droppings, via respiratory droplets, or in other bodily fluids). This means that the dog could be contagious to others before the symptoms of the disease become apparent.



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This is particularly important to consider if we know that our dog has potentially been exposed to a disease or another dog that was unwell. Maybe there was a sick dog in the waiting room at the vet when we visited, or one of the dogs at the dog park was coughing.

This is why isolating potentially infected animals can help prevent further spread of disease.

Some dog diseases pose a risk to humans!

Some dog disease pathogens can also cause disease in humans. These diseases are called 'zoonoses' (pronounced 'zoo-oo-no-seas'). Some of these can cause quite serious health issues in humans, so it is important that everyone takes regular precautions when handling and interacting with dogs regardless of whether the dog is sick or not.

The most important factor in preventing transmission of disease from dogs to humans is good hand hygiene.

This means making sure everyone who interacts with dogs washes their hands thoroughly with soap and water after any interaction with dogs, particularly before eating or drinking. Alcohol-based hand sanitiser can also be used.

The risk of zoonotic disease can also be reduced by ensuring that care is taken when cleaning up droppings, ensuring that your dog's home environment is kept clean and hygienic, making sure your dogs are up to date with all preventative treatments and vaccinations and avoiding contact with dogs that are unwell wherever possible.

If your dog is unwell, they should be seen by a veterinarian, who will be able to advise you whether there is increased zoonotic risk.

If you are cleaning up after a sick dog, take extra precautions such as wearing gloves or other protective clothing and carefully disposing of any waste. Hand hygiene is even more critical around sick animals, so make sure that you are vigilant.

Minimising the spread of Disease at Dogs Victoria Events

1. Dogs that are unwell, or have been in contact with unwell dogs should remain at home

Generally speaking, dogs that are sick or unwell are most contagious when they are actively showing signs of disease, however, many may be contagious just before showing symptoms or becoming unwell (during the 'incubation period' of the disease).

For this reason, Dogs Victoria's regulations specifically exclude dogs that are unwell, or who have recently been in contact with other dogs that have been unwell from attending events.

Regulation 3.5.16 Infectious Diseases or Viruses

(a) If a dog has been in a kennel or premises affected with distemper, canine hepatitis, parvovirus or any other virulent contagious disease (except Kennel Cough), it shall not be permitted to attend any Dogs Victoria event or grounds for a period of 12 weeks from the date of the first diagnosis or onset of symptoms.

(b) If a dog has been in a kennel or premises affected with or diagnosed with Canine Cough (also referred to as Kennel Cough or Canine Infectious Respiratory Disease Complex) it shall not be permitted to attend any Dogs Victoria event or grounds for a period of three weeks after the date of the first diagnosis or onset of symptoms.

The same regulation also gives those running the event the power to have a dog removed from the event or grounds if they are visibly unwell or showing symptoms consistent with the common contagious diseases in dogs.

(c) An event organiser or affiliate official may ask for a dog to be immediately removed from any Dogs Victoria event or grounds if that dog is visibly unwell or showing symptoms of the contagious diseases listed in (a) or (b). This shall be recorded in the VCA Representative's report.



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If your dog has any symptoms of disease, or you have visited a place where dogs were unwell or had symptoms of disease – keep your dogs at home and do not attend an event.

That last pass or those last few points are not as important as keeping your own dog, your friend's, and your fellow competitor's dogs safe from disease.

Also, if you see a dog that is visibly unwell, report it to a show official.

2. Practice good Hand Hygiene at events

Hands contaminated with infectious agents can be an important source of disease transmission – we all learned that during the COVID-19 pandemic!

Human hands can not only spread disease from dog to dog but as discussed above, can also lead to dog-to-human transmission of zoonoses.

To reduce the risk of spreading disease, everyone, including children, present at Dogs Victoria events need to practice good hand hygiene – cleaning their hands thoroughly with soap and water and using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser, especially after handling dogs, picking up poop, after handling equipment, bedding, bowls or any other dog-related items that could be contaminated, and before eating, drinking or smoking.

Although event organisers should ensure that hand wash and/or sanitiser stations are available and conveniently located, it is wise to pack hand sanitiser in your dog event travel kit.

Be mindful about petting, handling or touching multiple dogs. Although you may be a 'crazy dog-lover', you don't want to be the reason that a disease is spread from dog to dog. Practice good hand hygiene between touching different dogs.

3. Keeping the Venue and Equipment clean

Dogs Victoria events are held in all types of venues – from the local park or showgrounds to indoor venues such as KCC Park and the Bulla Exhibition Centre. Across the various Dog Sports, a variety of equipment is used, and competing dogs are housed in different ways.

It is the responsibility of each owner to clean up after their dog and to manage it in such a way that it does not foul the grounds or equipment. This includes ensuring that all dogs are given an opportunity to toilet in designated areas, and not inside pavilions or on shared equipment.

Dogs Victoria Regulation 7.5.12

At all times an exhibitor shall be responsible for cleaning up and the removal of droppings left by their exhibit. This includes any grooming waste within the environs of the event, including vehicle and camping areas.

Picking up after your dog(s), making sure that they don't pee on shared equipment, and cleaning up immediately if they do are all part of the basic expectations of competitors. These practices should extend into your everyday life as well!

Make sure that you pack poop bags, or use one of the pooper scoops provided, and ensure that you dispose of the waste in the correct bins.

Dogs Victoria's inside venues have mops and buckets available, and special instructions for cleaning the indoor surfaces. Make sure to familiarise yourself with each venue's indoor 'spills procedure'.

When using a communal mop bucket to clean up after your dog, make sure to check it is clean before use, and notify a show official if the bucket becomes contaminated – you don't want to be spreading contaminated cleaning fluids across the competition or benching/crating areas!

For outside areas, it may be necessary to flush the fouled area with water or use absorbent material such as sawdust to absorb and contain the mess.



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Remember that items such as event props (banners, signs, ring dividers), retrieval objects, obstacles, jumps, water bowls, and structures (doorways, stairs, walkways etc) can also become contaminated and serve as potential sources of disease. If your dog fouls any of these, make sure that you take the time to clean and disinfect them.

4. If your dog becomes unwell whilst at an event.....

Maybe your dog has just started coughing, or maybe it has vomited or passed some diarrhoea whilst you are waiting for your turn to compete. What should you do?

First of all, you should remove your dog(s) from the competition and benching/holding areas and isolate them in your car or trailer. Moving them away from other dogs quickly reduces the chances of other dogs becoming infected if the disease is contagious.

Pack up all of your gear (crates, leads, bedding etc.) These items should all be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected once you get home.

If your dog has soiled an area, it will need to be cleaned and disinfected – following the procedure outlined below.

If your dog is extremely unwell and you need to seek veterinary attention immediately, notify the Show Officials, and provide them with information about what you have done to clean and disinfect the area so far, and let them know of any other areas where your dog has been that may be at risk of contamination.

You should then take ALL of your dogs home. There is no point putting one dog in the trailer and continuing to compete with others – there is a high chance that they might be incubating the same disease.

You should also ensure that you seek veterinary attention and advice as soon as possible.

Cleaning and Disinfection

What do we mean by cleaning and disinfection?

Cleaning and disinfection are two different processes.

Cleaning refers to the physical removal of pathogens, dirt and organic matter from surfaces being cleaned. Cleaning alone does not kill pathogens, but it can help reduce the risk of spreading disease.

Cleaning involves first removing any visible faeces, vomit, blood, discharge, dirt and/or debris, followed by a thorough scrubbing of the area with detergent and water to break down and remove oils, grease and organic matter from the surface.

Cleaning is required before disinfection to reduce the amount of contamination and prepare the area so that a disinfectant can work properly.

Note: When cleaning, the goal is to prevent spreading germs and dirt, so care must be taken to properly dispose of dirty items, and to ensure that cleaning tools that are not disposable are disinfected properly before being used again.

Disinfection means using chemicals to kill or inactivate pathogens likely to cause disease on surfaces or objects.

There are a wide variety of disinfectant products available, and some are more effective than others in regard to specific pathogens. Many pathogens are quite fragile once outside of the body and can be easily killed by just about any type of disinfectant. Others, such as canine parvovirus, are notoriously difficult to kill and require specific types of disinfectant to be destroyed.

Some disinfectants can create fumes or may be toxic to humans or pets if used improperly, so it is important to follow the manufacturer's instructions on the label in relation to dilution or mixing, application and 'contact time' as well as following any safety precautions to ensure the disinfectant works as intended but does not pose a risk to either humans or animals.



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In most cases, any disinfectant labelled as 'hospital-grade' will be sufficient for regular disinfection. One of the cheapest and most readily available 'hospital-grade' disinfectants is household bleach.

There are many other disinfectants available on the market, some specifically for the veterinary market (kennels, clinics etc.) where animal toxicity is a critical factor and the risk of exposure to viruses such as parvovirus is much higher.

Standard Cleaning and Disinfection Protocol

1. Use Personal Protective Equipment

Before beginning, ensure that you make use of available Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). This may include gloves, masks, disposable clothing or other protective gear.

2. Isolate the Area

Remove any animals and people from the area.

The area may also need to be cordoned off to prevent other people or animals moving through the area.

3. Clean first

Physically remove and dispose of any solid matter or debris, placing it into leak-proof plastic bags.

This may include removing soiled bedding, using 'poop bags' or pooper scoopers to pick up droppings or vomit, and using paper towels or sawdust to soak up liquids.

Avoid direct contact if possible – treat all waste as if it could spread disease to humans.

Ensure all waste is placed into plastic bags and disposed of appropriately.

If possible, scrub the area with detergent and water, then dry.

4. Disinfection

Apply a disinfectant to the cleaned and dried area, following the manufacturer's instructions.

Follow all safety precautions on the label. Make sure to dilute the product correctly, allow correct contact time, and rinse if directed.

5. Clean and Disinfect Tools and Equipment

Ensure all tools and equipment that may have been contaminated – either directly or during cleaning - are in turn cleaned and disinfected. This may include pooper scoopers, mops, mop buckets, crates, bins, event equipment etc.

6. Hand Hygiene

Once the cleaning and disinfection process is completed, dispose of contaminated protective equipment and ensure that you practice good hand hygiene – clean hands thoroughly, and apply hand sanitiser.