

Prevent Poisonous Pyometra!

By Dr. Janine Devaney BVSc (Dist.)

A pyometra is the technical term for an abscessed, pus-filled uterus and is a common condition in older entire female dogs. Toxins and bacteria can leak across the uterine walls and into the bloodstream causing life-threatening toxic effects. Without treatment death is inevitable, and Steve and Helen Van der Valk nearly found this out recently with their beloved working dog Lace.

Lace presented late one Sunday night very unwell to veterinarian Dr Bill Hancock. In typical stoic working dog style Lace had been working hard and not showing any signs of illness, up until a couple of days prior. Being 9 years old, entire and having had a heat a couple of months prior, Lace was a prime candidate for pyometra. In fact she had been thought to be possibly pregnant. Unfortunately she had a horrendous bloody smelly discharge from her vulva and she was severely dehydrated. She was actually gravely ill as opposed to pregnant. Surgery to remove the infected uterine contents is the usual treatment required for pyometra and it can be very challenging as in Laces case, when the patient is very toxic already. Once Lace was stabilized as much as possible with intravenous fluids, multiple antibiotics and pain relief, I took her into surgery the following day. While the surgery was demanding it went as well as could be expected; however as Lace was already so very ill prior, her recovery was an ongoing battle to get the blood poisoning under control and to prevent organ failure from occurring. Lace ended up having a blood transfusion, multiple intravenous lines, numerous medications and a long hospital stay to ensure she would walk out the door again. Remarkably just seven days later she did just that (even after developing further complications), and is back on the farm eating dog roll untill the cows come home (and I suspect sleeping inside the house as opposed to her kennel!) I expect Lace will take many months to recover from her ordeal, in fact she will never be the same again; she is now spayed and has golden retriever blood on board!

Spaying your dog cannot be over-emphasized to prevent this condition. One in four entire female dogs will develop a pyometra in their lifetime. Often an owner plans to breed a pet or is undecided; as time passes they then fear she is too old to be spayed. Any female dog or cat can be spayed at any age. As vets we would much rather spay an old dog that is still healthy than wait until they are very sick when the risk of complications are much higher, the ability to save their lives is a lot harder and everything is obviously more costly. We had a good outcome in Laces case which was ultimately rewarding – but prevention is a lot easier in the long run.

PET OF THE SEASON
...meet Lace!

