



FACT SHEET

Neospora caninum



Neospora caninum is a protozoan parasite which can infect the cells and tissues of a wide range of warm-blooded mammals and occurs worldwide. Domestic dogs and wild dogs are the main hosts for this parasite.

ABOUT NEOSPORA CANINUM

Infected dogs shed the Neospora caninum parasite in their faeces, which can result in the infection of other dogs or other mammals (i.e. cattle, sheep, horses and many other species) which are known as 'intermediate hosts'.

Properties where domestic dogs or wild dogs and cattle co-exist may be at increased risk of observing this disease.

Research indicates that approximately two-thirds of beef cattle herds in NSW show evidence of infection with Neospora caninum.

HOW DOES THE DISEASE SPREAD?

Infection can occur in dogs via the following routes:

- by consuming contaminated food or water containing the parasite;
- by ingesting infected tissues/meat from an 'intermediate host' (e.g. cattle, sheep, horses, goats, deer);
- infection can be passed from a dam to her puppies via the placenta prior to birth or via the dam's milk following whelping.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF INFECTION?

Most adult dogs will not show any symptoms when they are infected.

However, symptoms are often observed in infected puppies or young dogs, particularly those less than 6 months of age.

The most severe infections tend to occur in young puppies and can be fatal.

Puppies which are infected prior to birth (i.e. by the infection passing from the dam via the placenta) or soon after birth (i.e. via an infected dam's milk) are often severely affected and may not survive.

The entire litter may be affected, leading to significant illness and loss of puppies. If an infected dam is not identified and treated, subsequent litters may also be affected.

Symptoms in puppies typically involve abnormalities of the nerves and muscles. Symptoms can include partial or complete paralysis of the front or hind legs.

The paralysis often progresses, becoming worse over time and can result in rigid contraction of the muscles of the affected limbs. Hind limbs are often worse affected than forelimbs.

Other symptoms include:

- weakness of the neck and difficulty swallowing;
- difficulty walking / incoordination;
- severe diarrhoea;
- pneumonia;
- heart problems.

In adult dogs, neurologic signs (such as inflammation of the brain and spinal cord), skin inflammation with sores, inflammation of the liver, pneumonia and inflammation of the heart may occur.

The outlook for puppies or adult dogs with severe symptoms is often poor due to the permanent damage which can occur to their muscles, nerves and organs.

