

ACCES for Pet Health

<http://blog.seattlepi.com/accesforpethealth/archives/213951.asp>

Reproductive Emergencies

By Beth Guerra, DVM



I remember learning about reproductive medicine in vet school but most patients I see are spayed or neutered and I don't have much cause to use my knowledge. However, in the past few months, I have seen a large number of intact patients; in some cases, these are pets used for breeding, in others, animals that may have been acquired later in life that were not spayed or neutered at an early age. Intact pets represent a category of emergency medicine that most people are not aware of...reproductive emergencies.

Intact female dogs are at risk for a condition called pyometra, which translates as a severe infection with pus development within the uterus. Intact dogs continue to have heat cycles and the uterus is under the influence of progesterone, which causes the uterine lining to thicken. Certain types of white blood cells infiltrate the uterine lining and fluid also accumulates within the uterus.

This is an optimal environment for bacterial growth. As the infection progresses, these dogs can become extremely ill and present with a myriad of symptoms, including dehydration, vomiting, and often shock. In some cases the cervix is open and allows the material to drain; this presents as vaginal discharge, often foul smelling or bloody. If the cervix is closed, the uterus continues to fill with material and can occasionally rupture, leading to a potentially fatal peritonitis (infection within the abdominal cavity). The fluid filled uterus can be visualized on x-rays or ultrasound. Bloodwork can reveal dehydration or an extremely high or low white blood cell count. There is a saying in emergency medicine "never let the sun set on a pyometra", meaning that these cases require immediate stabilization and surgery to remove the infected uterus. A majority of cases respond well to fluid support and antibiotics and make a full recovery after surgery.

Pregnant females, whether bred accidentally or intentionally, often present for dystocia, which is a term used to describe difficulty giving birth. Causes include a malpositioned or deformed fetus, narrow pelvic canal (possibly from prior trauma), or decrease or absence in uterine contractions, either from exhaustion or low calcium levels. The tendency for most females to have multiple babies means that any of these problems can occur at anytime during labor. Queens (female cats) tend to have prolonged labor, up to 24 hours, often stopping between kittens with no obvious contractions, especially if they are stressed. Female dogs, however, usually have rapid labor, and prolonged time between puppies without contractions can mean trouble. Whether the owner is an experienced breeder or a novice, there is the possibility that their pet could require assistance during labor.

Pets often present to the ER for exam if the owner feels the labor is not progressing as expected. A physical exam, x-rays, and vaginal exam can often isolate the problem. If the neonates are not causing any obstruction within the birth canal, injections of oxytocin can be given to help with uterine contractions. Close monitoring and repeat physical exams are crucial between injections to make sure no neonates are causing an obstruction in the canal. Oxytocin can cause uterine ruptures or tears if given with an obstructed canal. Emergency C-sections are often the safest option if the pet is in distress and if there are multiple babies. These surgeries can be quite expensive, especially in an emergency clinic, so this contingency should be considered before opting to breed a pet.

Intact male dogs can present with urgent diseases of the prostate and testicles. Testicular torsion (twisting of the testicle and cord) can occur and is extremely painful. The blood supply is often compromised and can lead to death of the tissues and systemic illness. Male dogs can also develop enlargement of the prostate, either from a benign process, infection, or cancer. Since the urethra runs through the prostate as it exits the bladder, an enlarged prostate can compress the urethra and cause difficulty urinating. The bladder continues to fill and can lead to severe electrolyte abnormalities and kidney disease, and in extreme cases can rupture.

If you have a pet who has not been fixed, make an appointment with your vet to talk about spaying or neutering. If you intend to breed your pet, or choose not to spay or neuter because they are a show animal, make sure you are fully informed about all the possible health risks that can occur, especially as your pet ages.

Posted by [Christina Ryan](#) at July 14, 2010 12:00 a.m.

· [Return to Reproductive Emergencies](#)