



Signs of Infections in Puppies

Extract from *The Dog Owner's Manual*
by Dr Karen Hedberg BVSc



Puppies that are sickly are thin, ribby and very 'light' to handle. Sick puppies are colder to the touch than healthy puppies. Their motions usually smell unhealthy and are often loose and discoloured (greenish). The puppies will not stay on the teat for long, suck poorly and fail to gain weight.

If antibiotics have been prescribed for the puppies, put the puppies on natural yoghurt as well. Newborn puppies gut bacteria are very easily upset by antibiotics. Yoghurt helps to return the gut bacteria to normal as it replaces the lactobacillus in the gastrointestinal tract. This is the bacteria needed for the digestion of milk. If you do not do this, the puppies may have diarrhoea and fail to gain weight. Give a fingertip full 3-4 times daily or a tiny bit of an acidophilus tablet or powder crushed into Nutrigel*.

If the bitch has to have antibiotic medication, this can pass through the milk and affect the puppies' gut bacteria. Give the puppies natural yoghurt or acidophilus over the course of the antibiotics and for 2-3 days after the bitch finishes the course. It is important to remember this, especially after caesareans, when the bitches are usually put on a short course of antibiotics.

1. 'Fading Puppy Syndrome'

An infection that will commonly affect a whole litter. The puppies are weak and weedy, they often have loose smelly motions, and soggy navel cords. Often the abdomens of the puppies are rather red and splotchy. Infected puppies are, from the start, poor at sucking and will only drink in a very half hearted manner. Puppies that are born with an infection may die within a few hours of birth. Occasionally there are dead puppies within these litters, and these tend to look slightly 'mushy' (underdone), and have dark red abdomens.

If you think your litter has an infection, take the whole litter, the bitch and the dead puppies to the vet. The vet will probably do a post-mortem on the dead puppies and swab the bitch. The puppies are usually placed on antibiotics but be warned: it requires very good nursing to save the puppies. Constant care, little feeds often and good temperature control are essential.

Remember to feed the puppies natural yoghurt or acidophilus as their gut bacteria are already upset without the effect of the antibiotics on top. Use Nutrigel* or a similar

supplement to try and put weight on the puppies. Supplement feed a good puppy milk formula as well, but make sure the milk is never too concentrated.

2. Infected milk from the bitch is relatively uncommon.

The puppies are usually born quite robust and healthy but start to go downhill within 24-48 hours. They fail to gain weight, become lethargic and may die within 3-4 days. This is a harder condition to recognise, as the puppies usually give no indication of any trouble until after 2-3 days of age, when the lack of weight gain is noticed.

The milk is usually discoloured, not a clean white colour. The colostrum is usually gone by 24 hours, so a persistent muddy yellow colour in the milk can alert you to the problem. Treatment is to swab the milk and put the bitch on antibiotics. The puppies are best hand fed or preferably put onto a foster mother. The puppies usually have to be put on antibiotics, as well as given acidophilus or Protexin* (a multibacterial gut bacterial replacer). Use these until the puppies start gaining weight, which should be within 2-3 days.

Unfortunately the infection in the milk is very difficult to clear up totally and, with subsequent pregnancies the same problem tends to recur. If your bitch has this problem, try antibiotics on that lactation. Have a milk swab about a week before the bitch is due to whelp the next time and be prepared to have to hand feed the puppies. If the problem recurs a second time, I would seriously consider not breeding from that bitch again as it is not worth the hassle. Alternatively, mate another bitch at the same time and be prepared to swap the puppies over onto the other bitch if problems develop.

